192 PAGES

FEBRUARY 1990
$2.50 U.S./$2.95 CAN

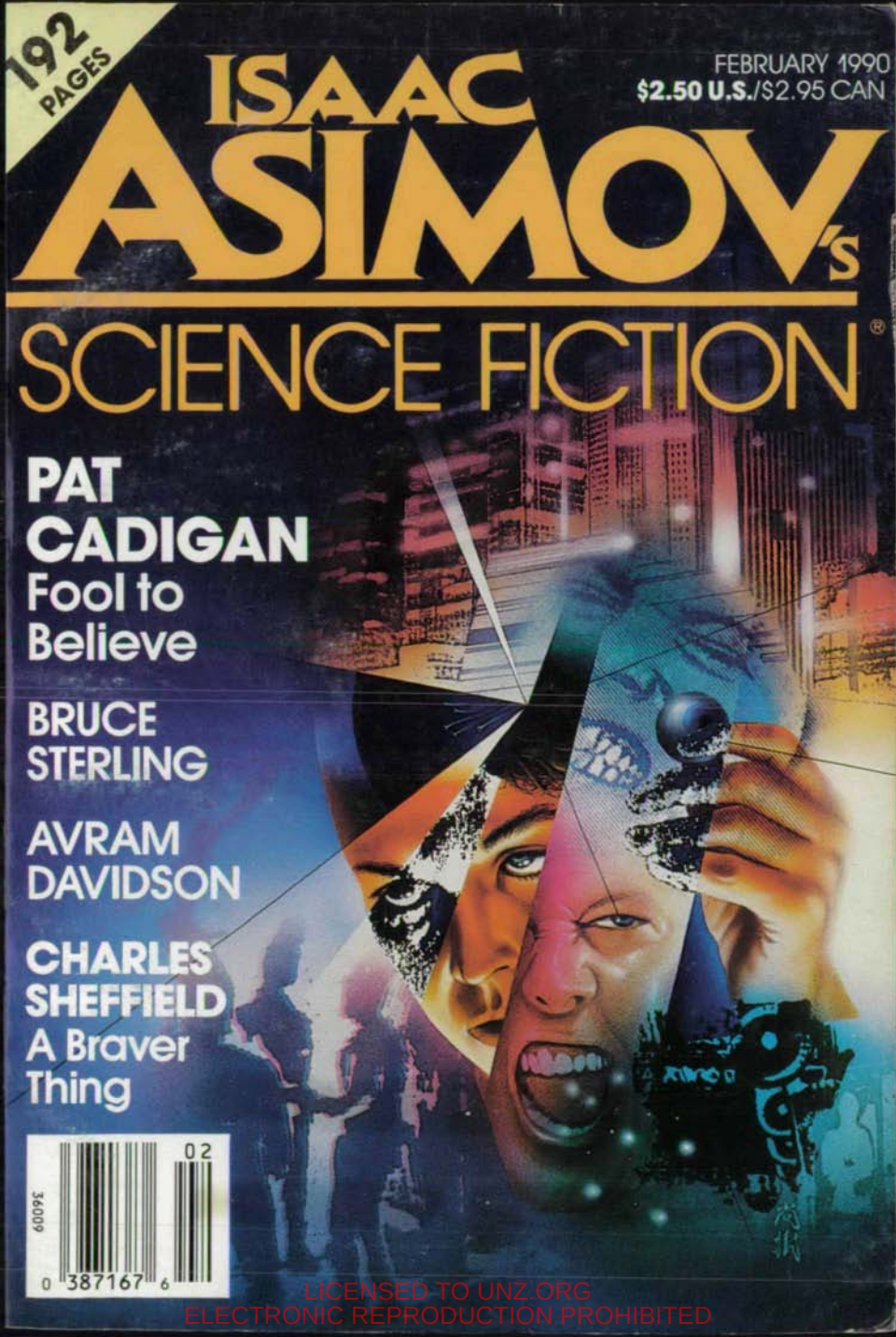
ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION®

PAT CADIGAN
Fool to Believe

BRUCE STERLING

AVRAM DAVIDSON

CHARLES SHEFFIELD
A Braver Thing



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The author of *Proteus Unbound* unleashes a major new sf adventure!

Two worlds, Opal and Quake, are linked by an enclosed bridge called the Umbilical. It can always be traversed—except during the annual Summertide, when both planets are stricken by vast tidal forces. Now the most deadly Summertide ever known is approaching—and a group of humans and aliens must survive it and their own violent interaction....

On Sale in February
A Del Rey Hardcover
$16.95

DEL REY #1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOK SIX OF
INCARNATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

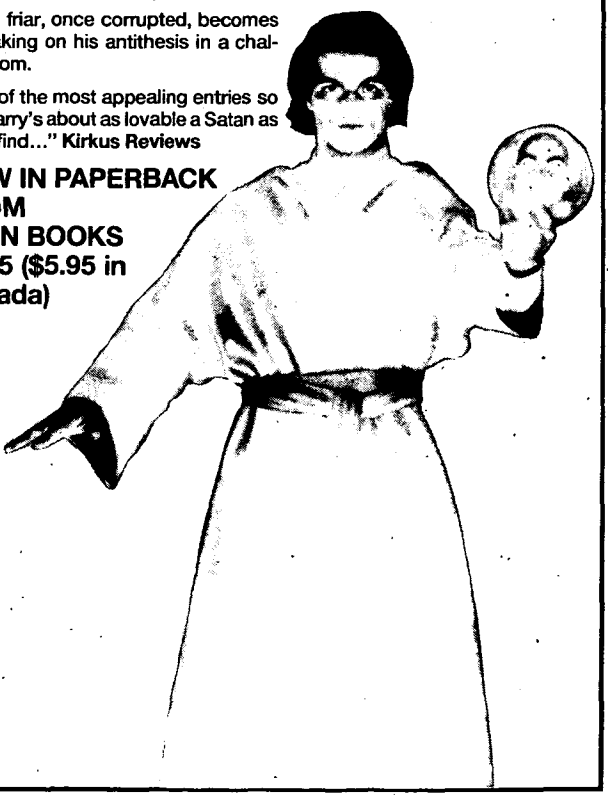
PIERS ANTHONY

FOR LOVE OF EVIL

A medieval sorcerer and friar, once corrupted, becomes the incarnation of evil, taking on his antithesis in a challenge to end God's kingdom.

"One of the most appealing entries so far–Parry's about as lovable a Satan as you'll find..." Kirkus Reviews

NOW IN PAPERBACK FROM AVON BOOKS $4.95 ($5.95 in Canada)



AVON BOOKS
The Hearst Corporation

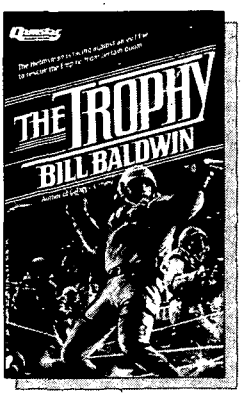
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEWS FROM Questar
SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

THE HELMSMAN IS BACK... THE ADVENTURE CONTINUES IN BILL BALDWIN'S NEWEST *THE TROPHY*

The Helmsman...Galactic Convoy... **and now the third thrilling book in the popular space opera that always delivers hair-trigger action and high-flying entertainment.**

Down on his luck, Wilf Brim, hero of the Galactic Empire, gets the chance to enter the prestigious Mitchell Trophy Race. Given a ship equipped with an experimental hyper-drive, he just could be in the lead to win the contest's fame and fortune. But the League of Dark Stars—not happy to see its old nemesis again—*sends in a ringer* to put Wilf out of the race... and make ready for a war that could doom the Empire to utter tyranny.



Cover art by John Berkey
0-445-20733-7/$3.95
(In Canada: $4.95)

POPULAR LIBRARY

At Bookstores Everywhere

Also this month: *CONTACT AND COMMUNE*

Humans and descendants of alternate evolutions collide in this blistering novel of alien intrigue by award-winning writer L. Neil Smith.

It is the 21st century, and man *must take to the stars to colonize* and harvest new planetoids. On far-off 2023 Eris, the Earth team discovers another group of Earthlings has gotten there first—beings of a different life-form. Soon conflicts between them end in murder...and the future of all human beings is threatened with extermination.

Cover art by Wayne Barlowe
0-445-20710-8/$3.95
(In Canada: $4.95)

POPULAR LIBRARY

At Bookstores Everywhere

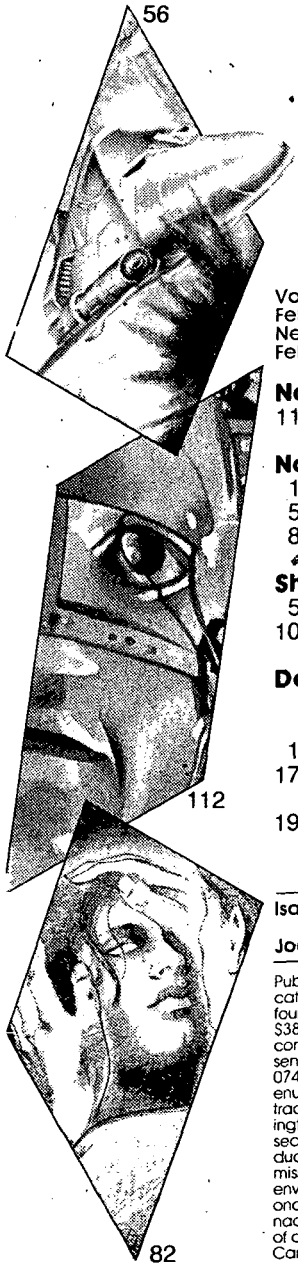
A WORD FROM Brian Thomsen

If space is "the final frontier" (the overused cliché), then "space opera" must be "future western." Six-shooters are traded in for ray guns, one-horse towns for deserted asteroids, horses for spaceships, and Indians for aliens.

Yet it's not that simple. Science fiction can utilize all of the same symbolic devices as the western, but it also goes beyond it, and I don't think anyone is going to mistake the race for the Mitchell trophy in Bill Baldwin's THE TROPHY for an old-time sagebrush rodeo...When you see me around, now that I've finished with cowboys, ask me about *pirates (and have a happy New Year).*

© Popular Library 1989

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION®

Vol. 14 No. 2 (Whole number 153)
February 1990
Next issue on sale
February 6, 1990

Novella

112 Fool to Believe — Pat Cadigan

Novelettes

16 A Braver Thing — Charles Sheffield
56 Joyride — Deborah Wessell
82 Travelers — Damian Kilby

Short Stories

52 Seeomancer — Avram Davidson
103 The Sword of Damocles — Bruce Sterling

Departments

4 Editorial: Attack! — Isaac Asimov
9 Letters
14 Neat Stuff — Matthew J. Costello
176 On Books: F & SF & Genre Expectations — Norman Spinrad
192 The SF Conventional Calendar — Erwin S. Strauss

Cover art for "Fool to Believe" by Hisaki Yasuda

Isaac Asimov: Editorial Director **Gardner Dozois:** Editor
Sheila Williams: Managing Editor
Joel Davis: President & Publisher **Terri Czeczko:** Art Director

Published every 28 days with two issues combined at year end by Davis Publications, Inc. at $2.50 per copy ($2.95 per copy in Canada). Basic subscription of fourteen issues $33.95 in the United States and U.S. possessions. In all other countries $38.65, payable in advance in U.S. funds. Address for subscriptions and all other correspondence about them, P.O. Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51566. For back issues send $3.50 to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462. Address for all editorial matters: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine® is the registered trademark of Davis Publications, Inc. © 1990 by Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. All rights reserved, printed in the U.S.A. Protection secured under the Universal and Pan American Copyright Conventions. Reproduction or use of editorial or pictorial content in any manner without express permission is prohibited. All submissions must include a self-addressed, stamped envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Second class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian third class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. POSTMASTER, send change of address to IAsfm, Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51566. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN 1045-6414.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITORIAL

by Isaac Asimov

ATTACK!

When I was first uneasily facing the prospect of having a magazine with my name on it, and was considering what kind of editorials I would write, I consulted Ben Bova, one of my good buddies, who was then editor of *Analog*.

"It doesn't matter," said Ben. "Whatever you do, whatever you say, you will be attacked by someone or other. Violently, too."

"I don't worry about that," I said. "If the attack is purely verbal, I can take care of myself. Still, if I'm going to be attacked, let it be for good reason. I'm going to state my opinions without trying to be coy about it."

"Good," he said. "I shall watch with interest."

So I did, and the attacks came, and I didn't mind, except I seem to detect what I think of as an "Ayatollization" of the world. It seems to me that people are taking up the cudgels in favor of the most outlandish things with all the appearance of protecting a faith, and what's more, a faith which must not be questioned by any infidel.

I expect exactly this when I say various unkind words about so-called "scientific" creationism. There I *am* attacking a troglodytish view of religion and I expect to get my lumps. And I do. I receive letters which call me names. I receive letters in which I am presented with arguments intended to convert me to troglodytism. I receive tracts. I even get letters assuring me that I will be prayed for. I don't mind any of it.

But then, when I speak my mind and say that too many women are not sufficiently feminist, I get the same kind of letters, and I think: Well, the matter does touch people deeply.

But, for goodness sake, when I casually mention, in passing, my absolute detestation of rock-and-roll music, I get letters (plural) acting as though I had just eaten ham on Yom Kippur. People are angry at my blasphemy and seem to think I have cast scorn upon the Ten Commandments. When I mention laughingly that *Raiders of the Lost Ark* had logical holes in it, I am challenged furiously and they defy me to show any holes in it whatever. Apparently, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was produced on orders from Mount Sinai and it contains neither errors nor contradictions.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But then I think: people are people, and person A is likely to be deeply committed to some belief that person B considers trivial. And *vice versa*.

So is there something I believe in so deeply that I would howl like fury if anyone were to scuff dirt upon it? Well, I firmly believe in the usefulness to society of good science fiction and I don't take kindly to snide comments about SF. I am committed to the use of reason and I value science beyond price, and I have no patience with anyone who sneers at either.

Still, I live with that all the time. There are always curled lips at science fiction, haughty upturned noses at reason and science and I am willing to argue about it, but I don't (at least I hope I don't) call down the thunders of an Ayatollah or a Torquemada.

Anything else?

Yes, there is something worse than any of these. I would repudiate with all the violence of which I am capable any suggestion that I have committed plagiarism. *There* is where I would start frothing at the mouth. It is the ultimate literary crime and I consider myself chemically free of it. I have been writing for 51 years, have published (as of now) 424 books and over 3000 shorter pieces, all of which I have made up out of my own little head and that's *it*.

I might overlap accidentally for I haven't read every bit of science fiction in existence, and may not know I'm overlapping. Sometimes

ISAAC ASIMOV:
Editorial Director
GARDNER DOZOIS:
Editor
SHEILA WILLIAMS:
Managing Editor
IAN RANDAL STROCK:
Editorial Assistant
TERRI CZECZKO:
Art Director
ANTHONY BARI:
Junior Designer
CAROLE DIXON:
Production Director
CYNTHIA MANSON:
Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights
FLORENCE B. EICHIN:
Permissions & Contracts Manager
CHRISTIAN DORBANDT:
Newsstand Marketing and Promotion
DENNIS JONES:
Newsstand Operations Manager
ELIZABETH BEATTY:
Subscription Manager
BRIAN McKEON:
Circulation Planning Director
A. BRUCE CHATTERTON:
Advertising Director
LISA FEERICK:
Advertising Coordinator
IRENE BOZOKI:
Classified Advertising Manager

ADVERTISING OFFICES
NEW YORK
(212) 557-9100

JOEL DAVIS
President and Publisher

CARL BARTEE
Vice President
Manufacturing

JOE DEFALCO
Vice President
Finance

Please do not send us your manuscript until you've gotten a copy of our manuscript guidelines. To obtain this, send us a self-addressed, stamped business-size envelope (what stationery stores call a number 10 envelope), and a note requesting this information. Please write "manuscript guidelines" on the bottom left-hand corner of the outside envelope. The address for this and for all editorial correspondence is *IAsfm*, Davis Publications, Inc. 380 Lexington Avenue, NY, NY 10017. While we're always looking for new writers, please, in the interest of time-saving, find out what we're looking for, and how to prepare it, before submitting your story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm even aware of the dangers thereof. I once wrote a story called "Each an Explorer" which struck me as being too close to Campbell's "Who Goes There?" and I labored like a stevedore to limit the similarity. I once wrote "Lest We Remember" and worked like a Trojan to keep it as far away from Keyes' "Flowers for Algernon" as possible.

So now let me tell you the story of my tale "The Ugly Little Boy." I wrote it between March 24 and April 1, 1958 (I keep meticulous records) and it appeared in the September 1958 issue of *Galaxy*. Horace Gold, the editor, irritated me into a fit by changing my title without consulting me, and calling it "Lastborn," but I repudiated that. It has appeared many times since then, and always with *my* title, "The Ugly Little Boy."

Anyway, that story, which appeared thirty-one years ago, is a classic and is, of all my stories, my third favorite. Since I like it so much it is not surprising that it has appeared in no fewer than five of my story collections. It has appeared in *Nine Tomorrows* (Doubleday, 1959), *The Edge of Tomorrow* (Tor, 1985), *The Best Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov* (Doubleday, 1986), *Other Worlds of Isaac Asimov* (Avenel, 1988), and *The Asimov Chronicles* (Dark Harvest, 1989).

You may ask why I include it in so many different collections. Well, some books are hard to get; some even go out of print; new generations of readers come up every three years, I am told. And since I like my stories I want new readers to have multiple chances of seeing them. Since my publishers are willing to oblige me in this, and I get no complaints from the readers, it is done.

In addition to these collections, which, of course, appear in British editions and in different languages, "The Ugly Little Boy" has, as an individual story, been anthologized four times that I know of and has appeared on its own in three different languages that I know of. There may be other appearances I *don't* know of.

The point is, however, that one way or another, "The Ugly Little Boy" has been available for thirty-one years, here and there. And *now* Tor Books has just put out a double volume. On one side is "The Ugly Little Boy" and on the other is Theodore Sturgeon's "The [Widget], the [Wadget], and Boff."

Now comes the nub. A woman completed a juvenile novel about a year and a half ago. I don't know if it has ever been published, and I've certainly never seen it. This woman has read a Tor publicity release concerning "The Ugly Little Boy" and, apparently, has not seen the story itself. She has read *only* the publicity release, which I haven't seen, by the way.

From that, she gathers that "The Ugly Little Boy" is about a little boy (for that matter, she can gather that from the title). So she sends me an outline of her novel, which also contains a little boy, but as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New York Times Bestseller NOW IN PAPERBACK!

L. RON HUBBARD

MISSION EARTH VOLUME 7

Voyage Of Vengeance

4,000,000 *Mission Earth* copies in print

If you haven't started reading the electrifying ***MISSION EARTH*** series, take advantage of our limited special introductory offer — buy Volume 1, THE INVADERS PLAN at the special price of $2.95 and start your reading adventure.

ACTION! EXCITEMENT! INTRIGUE! The alien odyssey on Earth continues in the wildest installment yet! *THRILL* as the deadly Soltan Gris flees New York City in a white-knuckle car-and-'copter chase, taking the madman ad-man J. Walter Madison and the precocious Teeny with him; *GASP* at their sordid yacht cruise through the pleasure ports of the world; *SHUDDER* as the murderous Antimancos kidnap Countess Krak from a commercial jetliner in a violent and daring air-to-air raid; *CHILL* when a grieving Jettero Heller is ambushed in a remote, abandoned Connecticut road house! Has all hope finally run out for our heroes? FIND OUT!

BUY YOUR COPY TODAY!

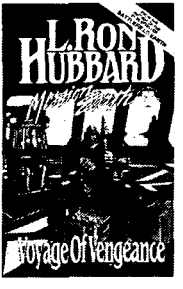
"...an incredibly good story, lushly written, vibrating with action and excitement."
— A.E. van Vogt

"...enough action in the plot to keep a dozen novels moving..."
— Buffalo News

GET YOUR COPY NOW!

$4.95 paperback at bookstores everywhere.

ALSO AVAILABLE ON AUDIO CASSETTE



Bridge Publications,
4751 Fountain Ave.
Los Angeles,
Calif. 90029

Copyright © 1989 Bridge Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.
MISSION EARTH is a trademark owned by L. Ron Hubbard Library and is used with its permission. 1105891552

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nearly as I can make out has no other single point of similarity with my story. (I might point out that Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* also has a little boy in it.)

Apparently, though, the presence of a little boy in both is enough for her. She is not aware that "The Ugly Little Boy" has been around for a long time; has never seen it in any of its many incarnations, and refers to it as a new book.

So what does she do?

Easy. She writes me an intemperate letter, telling me that my story written in 1958 is clearly a plagiarism of her (possibly unpublished) story that was written in 1987 at the earliest.

Obviously, I have a time machine in good working order.

Thank goodness, she didn't accuse me of directly plagiarizing her piece twenty-nine years before it was written. She felt I had a little integrity; some small amount of scrupulousness. She thinks that what happened was that some agent or editor must have seen her story, didn't want it from an unknown, and fed it to me so that with my name on it, it would make a million dollars.

She wanted me to reply and tell her how I could possibly have come up with the idea for "The Ugly Little Boy" in any other way. It seems to me that she didn't think I could come up with a plausible solution to this dilemma.

So here I am, an accused plagiarist.

For half a century, I've waited for such an accusation so that I could rise in wrath and call down the thunders of heaven on anyone who dared do such a thing.

And it's happened, and I find that all I can do is laugh. It's funny. Of course, I wrote a letter to the young lady and worked up whatever indignation I could. After all, you don't draw conclusions from a publisher's publicity release. You read the story. And you don't just assume it's a new story; you look at the copyright notice. And you don't assume that someone with my track record (she refers to me as a famous author) would stoop to plagiarism, unless you have good, hard, evidence to present.

I'll have to tell this to Ben Bova. He'll probably laugh himself into hysterics. ●

MOVING? If you want your subscription to *IAsfm* to keep up with you, send both your old address and your new one (and the ZIP codes for both, please!) to our subscription department: Box 7058, Red Oak, Iowa 51566.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS

Dear Dr. Asimov:

Enclosed you will find a copy of an editorial column written by Richard Reeves and printed in the *Atlanta Constitution* on March 8, 1989. I send you this column, which extolls the benefits of a high relative population of lawyers, in the hope that it will have the effect of softening your apparently unreasoned bias against attorneys. It is very distressing to me to read your replies to readers and find, almost without fail, that you are rude and insulting to attorneys, even when they are agreeing with you on whatever subject prompted the letter and have not deserved your scorn.

Dr. Asimov, I have been a science fiction fan since early childhood and an attorney for only a few months. Your influence on my attitudes toward science fiction, technology, and the scientific method is incalculable. I have always had the greatest respect for your dedication to objective, dispassionate reasoning, based on demonstrated fact, as the only acceptable method for reaching a valid conclusion. Your books and stories prove that you are extravagantly capable of such reasoning.

I ask you, Good Doctor, please examine your prejudice against attorneys and determine whether it is supported by the facts as determined by you or any other reputable source. If you want to take aim against attorneys who deserve your censure, feel free. There are many who do. Please, however, do so on the basis of their individual failings and not simply because they practice law.

Matt Billips
Atlanta, GA

I'll tell you what bothers me about lawyers. A rich man can hire a lot of very clever lawyers. A poor man cannot. Therefore, when a rich man and a poor man have a dispute and turn to the lawyers, the rich man usually wins. The same is true of all other professional men, too (people with money can get me to write for them and people without can't, for instance), but in the case of lawyers, it makes a particular mockery of the American dream.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov;

Just a line to say that unlike many of your readers, I did not become acquainted with your work via science fiction. Rather, I discovered you while doing research for a lengthy dissertation on the history of Religion. While attempting to obtain a copy of *Asimov's*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Guide to the Bible, I became acquainted with your publication, *IAsfm*. I am sorry only for the fact that I had, until this time, ignored "pulp" magazines as you so aptly put it in you April Editorial.

IAsfm's subscription has just been renewed in our home, and has given me a new insight into SF writers.

Joyce M. Yeo
Fort Erie, Ont.
Canada

I spread my net wide. Only last night someone told me that he was acquainted with my work only because he saw a planetarium version of my story "The Last Question"; and someone else told me that his girl friend gave him a copy of my The Annotated Gulliver's Travels *and that that started him. I wish that everyone who encountered me anywhere would find his way to the magazine.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors;

I was astonished to read letters of praise for Geoffrey Landis's story "Vacuum States," because I felt the story was a failure in all aspects.

The scientific speculation around which the story revolves, extracting energy from the vacuum, is nothing new. The McAndrew stories, by Charles Sheffield, featured such an energy source years ago. The idea that such energy extraction might destroy space itself has also been suggested before; in fact, in his review of Sheffield's book in the November 1983 *Analog*, Tom Easton thought the book should have addressed this possibility.

As for style, the second-person narration in which "Vacuum States" is told was poorly handled. Instead of recalling successful examples of second-person narration, such as Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* or Robert Silverberg's "Sundance," the story sounds painfully like a juvenile "choose your own adventure" book.

The story's greatest failing is in the scenario it depicted. The entire story is an exposition of the most utterly contrived "lady and the tiger" scenario I have ever read. One improbability after another is added to make as much as possible hang on the protagonist's decision. I thought it was ridiculous in the extreme.

In short, I felt the story was poorer than Landis's other stories, and far below the standard I expect from *Asimov's*.

T.F. Chiang
Providence, RI

Oh, well, chacun a son gout. *However, if we rejected stories that dealt with some scientific points that had been dealt with in earlier stories, we'd never be able to accept* any *stories.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Mr. Asimov,

I don't know if it was you personally (and, what with time considerations, I imagine that it wasn't), but somebody over there read and promptly answered my request for a replacement of the April 1989 issue. Thank you (whoever it was), very much.

Since you publish so early, I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

usually get my issue at an odd time of the month—a time which I, in my absent-mindedness, rarely keep up with. Because of this, I hardly noticed when I didn't get my April issue. In fact, I didn't realize it until I got the May issue!

Well, that's all settled now.

Thanks once again, and keep up the good work.

Jeremy A. Edwards

It's so much easier to write a letter to complain about the magazine's shortcomings that I can't resist including a letter that thanks us for doing something right, even though it was handwritten and not typed.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

The letter in your May issue from Patricia Quay, and your reply to it, made me stop and think. I also am an aspiring writer (in fact, as I write this, four of my stories are sitting in your editorial offices). I think I understand Mrs. Quay, perhaps better than you do.

You stand on a nearly unique pinnacle in your field (in my estimation you share it only with Arthur C. Clarke and the late Robert Heinlein): virtually everything you write is saleable. I don't doubt that if a book entitled *The Collected Grocery Lists of Isaac Asimov* were published, it would sell. (A sure giveaway of this drawing power is the sight of a book cover on which the author's name is about four type sizes larger than the title.)

You can very easily say "write it and if it doesn't sell, what the heck" because there is approximately a ninety-nine percent probability that anything you write *will* sell. What's more, this has been true long enough that you may have trouble remembering 'way back when, when you were still collecting your fair share of rejection letters. Having myself collected a small but growing selection of such letters, I think I know Mrs. Quay's feelings. Yes, I love to write, but it is not enough to write just for myself.

Anybody with a marginal command of the language and a No. 2 Eberhard Faber can put words on paper and call himself a writer. By that definition, I am already a writer; what I want to be is a Writer; i.e., someone whose words have been published and read by others. To me, the financial consideration is the least important part of it. The most important thing is to have someone (an editor) say "You done good" in the most sincere way: by buying and printing my words. The money is mainly a convenient way to keep score.

At this point, I have no idea what fate awaits my four submissions. There is a good chance I will merely enlarge my collection by four letters. What I *do* know is that I will continue to seek that capital W; and some day, perhaps I'll earn it. Like Mrs. Quay, I would like to thank you for giving me incentive. Whenever I receive one of those ominous manila return envelopes in the mail, I remember reading an essay of yours in which you mentioned that you had a dozen of your stories rejected before you made your first sale. Tell Mr. Dozois that he hasn't seen the last of me.

John W. Floars
Woodbridge, VA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As a matter of fact, my memory is an inconveniently good one, and I remember very well my exact feelings when I received rejection after rejection. But you know what's the alternative to saying "what the heck" to a rejection? Getting angry and refusing to write any more. What good will that do you? So I think my advice is good. Incidentally, I average about one rejection a year even today so I don't think anyone would publish my collected grocery lists.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

When I pick up a copy of *IAsf* Magazine, your editorial is generally the first page I turn to. I have come to expect lively and witty comments from a broadminded, intellectual man. However, after reading "Cosmopolitan" (May '89), I was shocked that a person like yourself could be so judgmental.

I am referring to your offensive remarks concerning rock musicians. It is ironic that one who has done so much to establish science fiction as "SERIOUS" literature, could be so critical of someone else's artform. While there are multitudes of mindless, off-key groups flooding the market, there are also many talented and intelligent people in the music industry.

I suspect that, like most of your generation, you simply do not like the loud music. But, if you were to read the lyrics, you would find that "good" rock is a relevant social medium. It has dealt with topics such as religion, war, child abuse, governmental corruption, and other contemporary concerns. Subjects that have long been regarded as taboo by other mediums. So, you see, rock music can be thought-provoking. Frankly, Dr. Asimov, you should be ashamed of yourself for stereotyping rock-and-rollers as imbeciles.

Richard W. Hubbard
DeRuyter, N.Y.

All right, how about if I stigmatize rock-and-rollers as deaf, since it is well-established that the loudness damages the sense of hearing. And I can't believe anyone ever hears the words; the listeners are all screaming. And one question: must I hear with your ears, or am I allowed to hear with my own?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I can't tell you how much I enjoyed Robert Silverberg's "Enter a Soldier. Later: Enter Another." Part of the reason why I enjoyed his tale so much is that I am a graduate student in Classics at Tufts University, and I am amazed at how well Silverberg captured the essence of the Platonic Socrates: his cleverness, sense of humor, "Socratic ignorance," and his constant obsession with questions of virtue and justice. But what really made Silverberg's Socrates so amazing was not so much that the author captured the essence of what Plato's Socrates would say, but how he would say it. Plato's genius in characterization is certainly not an easy act to follow! I also liked Silverberg's references to Aristophanes' *Clouds*, a terrific comedy.

I certainly wish that someone would invent some "parallax fil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE BEST IN HARDCOVER SF & FANTASY--BY MAIL!

Patterns by Pat Cadigan
14 stories from one of *IASFM*'s most popular authors: *"Some of the best work done by anyone in the 80's."*
Gardner Dozois
IASFM Editor
Introduction by Bruce Sterling. 224pp/hdcv. $19.95

First Maitz by Don Maitz
44 full color f&sf paintings by award-winning artist Don Maitz. Includes over 60 b&w illustrations, introduction by *Gene Wolfe*, and commentary by the artist and his admirers--including *Raymond Feist* and *Michael Whelan*. 9"x12"/hdcv. 100pp. $24.95

COMING SOON: Books by Lucius Shepard, Pat Cadigan, Gardner Dozois, K.W. Jetter and more!

By Bizarre Hands
by Joe R. Lansdale
The Stoker Award-winning author's first collection. 14 excursions into terror and wonder by a master of fantasy. Introduction by *Lewis Shiner*. Dustjacket art by *IASFM* favorite *J.K. Potter*. Illustrated. Hardcover. $25.00

The Short, Sharp, Shock
by Kim Stanley Robinson
A brand-new short novel by the author of *Escape from Katmandu*. Tree people, spine-kings and sorcerors vividly come to life in this epic tale of loss and redemption. Illustrated/hdcv. $18.00

TO ORDER USING VISA OR MASTERCARD CALL TOLL-FREE:
1-800-869-0348
OR SEND CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS TO:

MARK V. ZIESING
PUBLISHER/BOOKSELLER
POST OFFICE BOX 76 SHINGLETOWN, CA 96088

Shipping charges are $2.00 for the first book, 75¢ for each additional.
Send $1.00 for a catalog offering over 300 new and rare SF/Fantasy/Horror books for sale.

ters," Silverberg's device for distinguishing the historical Socrates from all the myth which surrounds him. I am writing a paper on Socrates this semester, and I could really use those filters right now!

My Greek professor, despite the fact that he is such an incredibly intelligent guy, really disappointed me this semester. During a class discussion of current literary tastes, he mentioned that although he read science fiction in his youth, he despises it now because its mass-produced popularity has debased the quality of the genre. He actually compared the science fiction found in today's bookstores to **Romance Novels!** Ouch! I've decided that Silverberg's story will force him—if anything can—to realize that high-quality, intelligent science fiction does exist, at least in your wonderful magazine. (The excuse for introducing it to him will be that it fits in so well with the topic of my paper, of course). Wish me luck!

And please, Dr. Asimov, tell Robert Silverberg how inspiring he is.
Sincerely,

Mary Lou Carroll
Gardner, MA

Don't be amazed. Robert Silverberg is absolutely one of the most intelligent and widely-knowledged people I know. Just because he isn't as loud-mouthed and as extroverted as I am, he is less well-recognized as a polymath of the most astonishing kind. However, those who know him know him for what he is—simply terrific.

—Isaac Asimov

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEAT STUFF

by Matthew J. Costello

The recent Origins National Game Convention was held in the Hilton, just outside the Los Angeles Airport, and the gamers that occupied the Hilton were there for just one purpose. An Origins con is a celebration of gaming, and of the imagination that goes into the design and playing of games drawn from the gritty streets of 1942 Stalingrad to the mystic realm of Andre Norton's *Witch World*. And this was probably the last traditional Origins Con. The winds of change—exciting change—were blowing. . . .

Origins started as an Avalon Hill Game Company con, a chance for all the avid wargamers to gather, play games together, and share the fun of historical reenactments. In time, fantasy and SF gaming, especially the dizzying myriad of role-playing games, would come to nearly dominate the field.

From the first Origins in 1975, on the campus of John Hopkins University, the convention has grown. It's the place to be to see things to come in the gaming field. And though the company heavily promotes general interest games, like the recent *Past Lives,* they have remained faithful to the roots of the hobby.

At this year's Origins they released *Turning Point: Stalingrad*, returning to a theme of one of their classic, easily-played games, *Stalingrad*. They also released *Troll Gods* for the Runequest role-playing system.

FASA, still enjoying heady success with their *Battletech* system of role-playing and board games, had information on an exciting project—*Battletech Centers*. These Centers will allow teams of players to actually man the giant robots of the battletech worlds, linked by a central computer that presents state-of-the-art graphics while recording the team's success. FASA also had flyers for a new game system, *Shadowrun*, that combines magic and technology for an interesting, post-apocalyptic game world. A role-playing game is promised, as well as modules, and novels set in the Shadowrun Universe.

TSR, the company that brought *Dungeons and Dragons* to life, had new board games. *Dungeons* is a completely new game of hack-and-slash treasure hunting, while *Web of Gold* offers giant spiders and labyrinthine mine shafts. *Bug Hunter* is a stand-alone game that uses the Sniper game system to hunt down pesky alien intruders.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Among Steve Jackson's new GURPS releases—the Generic Universal Role-playing System, if you must know—is *Witch World*, a thick compendium of background and rules governing role-playing the shadowy realm of Andre Norton's *Witch World*.

Games Workshop, the UK game company that has revolutionized gaming in Britain, was showing their new game, *Space Hulk*. Space Marines have to fight their way through deserted ships filled with lurking aliens in a variety of scenarios involving rescue and escape. Like all GW games, *Hulk* comes with dozens of plastic aliens, marines, and floor pieces. They also had an imported version of a new co-production with Milton Bradley UK. It's called *Heroquest*, and it features a book of quests, a dungeon gameboard, and plastic bookcases, tables, orcs, and other fantasy paraphernalia.

Games Designers Workshop had new releases supporting their *Space:1889* system, *Beastmen of Mars* and the ever reliable *Conklin's Atlas of the Worlds*. There was also a new release for Megatraveller, *COAC* (Close Orbit and Air Command). *Last Battle* is a new tank-to-tank boardgame for *Twilight:2000*.

Appropriately—twenty years after the summer of love and moonmen—Task Force Games was showing *Liftoff*, a simulation game of the first moon landing.

Each year, it seems like more computer game companies come to Origins. It's some source of concern to the game companies that the younger gamers tend to play only computer simulations. Microprose was showing segments from their upcoming *Samurai* and Sandy Petersen, designer of the role-playing game *Call of Cthulhu*, was there saying nothing about rumors that he was designing a horror game for Microprose.

SSI was showing their licensed *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* games, with *Heroes of the Lance* and *Pool of Radiance* getting a lot of attention.

Play-By-Mail games were represented by Adventures-by-Mail's *Monster Island*, and Adventure Simulation Games *Dark Blades*. *Teenagers from Outer Space*, from R. Talsorian and long a favorite of mine, was sporting a spiffy new cover.

The host of this Origins was 3W—World Wide Wargames—and they were showing four new games, including *Tomorrow the World*, a what–if exercise that has the Nazis and the Japanese Empire invading the good old U.S.A.

Next year's Origins will be at Atlanta (June 28-July 1) where, for the first time, there will be book and media guests of honor, including Tom Clancy, Janet and Chris Morris, and Doug Chaffe. There has been a growing synergism between games and books, and this Origins, to be staged by Dragon Con, will be the first Origins to recognize that fact. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A BRAVER THING

by Charles Sheffield

art: Robert Shore

The author was raised in the north of England, attended a non-private, non-prestigious grammar school, and majored in mathematics at Cambridge University, where he was a scholar of St. John's College. The relevance of all of this information will, he tells us, only become apparent after one reads the following story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The palace banquet is predictably dull, but while the formal speeches roll on with their obligatory nods to the memory of Alfred Nobel and his famous bequest, it is not considered good manners to leave or to chat with one's neighbors. I have the time and opportunity to think about yesterday; and, at last, to decide on the speech that I will give tomorrow.

A Nobel prize in physics means different things to different people. If it is awarded late in life, it is often viewed by the recipient as the capstone on a career of accomplishment. Awarded early (Lawrence Bragg was a Nobel Laureate at twenty-five) it often defines the winner's future; an early Prize may also announce to the world at large the arrival of a new titan of science (Paul Dirac was a Nobel Laureate at thirty-one).

To read the names of the Nobel Prize winners in physics is almost to recapitulate the history of twentieth-century physics, so much so that the choice of winners often seems self-evident. No one can imagine a list without Planck, the Curies, Einstein, Bohr, Schrödinger, Dirac, Fermi, Yukawa, Bardeen, Feynman, Weinberg, or the several Wilson's (though Rutherford is, bizarrely, missing from the Physics roster, having been awarded his Nobel Prize in Chemistry).

And yet the decision-making process is far from simple. A Nobel Prize is awarded not for a lifetime's work, but explicitly for a particular achievement. It is given only to living persons, and as Alfred Nobel specified in his will, the prize goes to "the person who shall have made the most important discovery or invention within the field of physics."

It is those constraints that make the task of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences so difficult. Consider these questions:

●What should one do when an individual is regarded by his peers as one of the leading intellectual forces of his generation, but no single accomplishment offers the clear basis for an award? John Archibald Wheeler is not a Nobel Laureate; yet he is a "physicist's physicist," a man who has been a creative force in half a dozen different fields.

●How does one weight a candidate's *age*? In principle, not at all. It is not a variable for consideration; but in practice every committee member knows when time is running out for older candidates, while the young competition will have opportunities for many years to come.

●How soon after a theory or discovery is it appropriate to make an award? Certainly, one should wait long enough to be sure that the accomplishment is "most important," as Nobel's will stipulates; but if one waits too long, the opportunity may vanish with the candidate. Max Born was seventy-two years old when he received the Nobel Prize in 1954—for work done almost thirty years earlier on the probabilistic interpretation of the quantum mechanical wave function. Had George Gamow lived as long as Born, surely he would have shared with Penzias and Wilson the 1978 prize, for the discovery of the cosmic background radiation. Einstein

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1921, at the age of forty-two. But it cited his work on the photoelectric effect, rather than the theory of relativity, which was still considered open to question. And if his life had been no longer than that of Henry Moseley or Heinrich Hertz, Einstein would have died unhonored by the Nobel Committee.

So much for logical choices. I conclude that the Nobel rules allow blind Atropos to play no less a part than Athene in the award process.

My musings can afford to be quite detached. I know how the voting must have gone in my own case, since although the work for which my award is now being given was published only four years ago, already it has stimulated an unprecedented flood of other papers. Scores more are appearing every week, in every language. The popular press might seem oblivious to the fundamental new view of nature implied by the theory associated with my name, but they are very aware of its monstrous practical potential. A small test unit in orbit around Neptune is already returning data, and in the tabloids I have been dubbed Giles "Starman" Turnbull. To quote The New York *Times*: "The situation is unprecedented in modern physics. Not even the madcap run from the 1986 work of Müller and Bednorz to today's room-temperature superconductors can compete with the rapid acceptance of Giles Turnbull's theories, and the stampede to apply them. The story is scarcely begun, but already we can say this, with confidence: Professor Turnbull has given us the stars."

The world desperately needs heroes. Today, it seems, I am a hero. Tomorrow? We shall see.

In a taped television interview last week, I was asked how long my ideas had been gestating before I wrote out the first version of the Turnbull Concession Theory. And can you recall a moment or an event, asked the reporter, which you would pinpoint as seminal?

My answer must have been too vague to be satisfactory, since it did not appear in the final television clip. But in fact I could have provided a very precise location in space-time, at the start of the road that led me to Stockholm, to this dinner, and to my first (and, I will guarantee, my last) meeting with Swedish royalty.

Eighteen years ago, it began. In late June, I was playing in a public park two miles from my home when I found a leather satchel sitting underneath a bench. It was nine o'clock at night, and nearly dark. I took the satchel home with me.

My father's ideas of honesty and proper behavior were and are precise to a fault. He would allow me to examine the satchel long enough to determine its owner, but not enough to explore the contents. Thus it was, sitting in the kitchen of our semi-detached council house, that I first encountered the name of Arthur Sandford Shaw, penned in careful red ink on the soft beige leather interior of the satchel. Below his name was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an address on the other side of town, as far from the park as we were but in the opposite direction.

Should we telephone Arthur Sandford Shaw's house, tell him that we had his satchel, and advise him where he could collect it?

No, said my father gruffly. Tomorrow is Saturday. You cycle over in the morning and return it.

To a fifteen-year-old, even one without specific plans, a Saturday morning in June is precious. I hated my father then, for his unswerving, blinkered attitude, as I hated him for the next seventeen years. Only recently have I realized that "hate" is a word with a thousand meanings.

I rode over the next morning. Twice I had to stop and ask my way. The Shaw house was in the Garden Village part of the town, an area that I seldom visited. The weather was preposterously hot, and at my father's insistence I was wearing a jacket and tie. By the time that I dismounted in front of the yellow brick house with its steep red-tile roof and diamond glazed windows, sweat was trickling down my face and neck. I leaned my bike against a privet hedge that was studded with sweet-smelling and tiny white flowers, lifted the satchel out of my saddlebag, and rubbed my sleeve across my forehead.

I peered through the double gates. They led to an oval driveway, enclosing a bed of well-kept annuals.

I saw pansies, love-in-a-mist, delphiniums, phlox, and snapdragons. I know their names now, but of course I did not know them *then*.

And if you ask me, do I truly remember this so clearly, I must say, of course I do; and will, until my last goodnight. I have that sort of memory. Lev Landau once said, "I am not a genius. Einstein and Bohr are geniuses. But I am very talented." To my mind, Landau (1962 Nobel Laureate, and the premier Soviet physicist of his generation) was certainly a genius. But I will echo him, and say that while I am not a genius, I am certainly very talented. My memory in particular has always been unusually precise and complete.

The sides of the drive curved symmetrically around to meet at a brown-and-white painted front door. I followed the edge of the gravel as far as the front step, and there I hesitated.

For my age, I was not lacking in self-confidence. I had surveyed the students in my school, and seen nothing there to produce discomfort. It was clear to me that I was mentally far superior to all of them, and the uneasy attitude of my teachers was evidence—to me, at any rate—that they agreed with my assessment.

But this place overwhelmed me. And not just with the size of the house, though that was six times as big as the one that I lived in. I had seen other big houses; far more disconcerting were the trained climbing roses and espaliered fruit trees, the weed-free lawn, the bird-feeders, and the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

height, texture and improbable but right color balance within the flower beds. The garden was so carefully structured that it seemed a logical extension of the building at its center. For the first time, I realized that a garden could comprise more than a hodge-podge of grass and straggly flowers.

So I hesitated. And before I could summon my resolve and lift the brass knocker, the door opened.

A woman stood there. At five feet five, she matched my height exactly. She smiled at me, eye to eye.

Did I say that the road to Stockholm began when I found the satchel? I was wrong. It began with that smile.

"Yes? Can I help you?"

The voice was one that I still thought of as "posh," high-pitched and musical, with clear vowels. The woman was smiling again, straight white teeth and a broad mouth in a high-cheekboned face framed by curly, ash-blond hair. I can see that face before me now, and I know intellectually that she was thirty-five years old. But on that day I could not guess her age to within fifteen years. She could have been twenty, or thirty, or fifty, and it would have made no difference. She was wearing a pale-blue blouse with full sleeves, secured at the top with a mother-of-pearl brooch and tucked into a grey wool skirt that descended to mid-calf. On her feet she wore low-heeled tan shoes, and no stockings.

I found my voice.

"I've brought this back." I held out the satchel, my defense against witchcraft.

"So I see." She took it from me. "Drat that boy, I doubt he even knows he lost it. I'm Marion Shaw. Come in."

It was an order. I closed the door behind me and found myself following her along a hall that passed another open door on the left. As we approached, a piano started playing rapid staccato triplets, and I saw a red-haired girl crouched over the keyboard of a baby grand.

My guide paused and stuck her head in for a moment. "Not so fast, Meg. You'll never keep up that pace for the whole song." And then to me, as we walked on, "Poor old Schubert, 'Impatience' is right, it's what he'd feel if he heard that. Do you play?"

"We don't have a piano."

"Mm. I sometimes wonder why we do."

We had reached an airy room that faced the back garden of the house. My guide went in before me, peered behind the door, and clucked in annoyance.

"Arthur's gone again. Well, he can't be far. I know for a fact that he was here five minutes ago." She turned to me. "Make yourself at home, Giles. I'll find him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Giles. I have been terribly self-conscious about my first name since I was nine years old. By the time that I was twenty I had learned how to use it to my advantage, to suggest a lineage that I never had. But at fifteen it was the bane of my life. In a class full of Tom's and Ron's and Brian's and Bill's, it did not fit. I cursed my fate, to be stuck with a "funny" name, just because one of my long-dead uncles had suffered with it.

But there was stronger witchcraft at work here. I had arrived unheralded on her doorstep.

"How do you know my name?"

That earned another smile. "From your father. He called me early this morning, to make sure someone would be home. He didn't want you to bike all this way for nothing."

She went out, and left me in the room of my dreams.

It was about twelve feet square, with an uncarpeted floor of polished hardwood. All across the far wall was a window that began at waist height, ran to the ceiling, and looked south to a vegetable garden. The windowsill was a long work bench, two feet deep, and on it stood a dozen projects that I could identify. In the center was a compound microscope, with slides scattered all around. I found tiny objects on them as various as a fly's leg, a single strand of hair, and two or three iron filings. The mess on the left-hand side of the bench was a half-ground telescope lens, covered with its layer of hardened pitch and with the grinding surface sitting next to it. The right side, just as disorderly, was a partially-assembled model airplane, radio-controlled and with a two c.c. diesel engine. Next to that stood an electronic balance, designed to weigh anything from a milligram to a couple of kilos, and on the other side was a blood-type testing kit. The only discordant note to my squeamish taste was a dead puppy, carefully dissected, laid out, and pinned organ by organ on a two-foot square of thick hardboard. But that hint of a possible future was overwhelmed by the most important thing of all: everywhere, in among the experiments and on the floor and by the two free-standing aquariums and next to the flat plastic box behind the door with its half-inch of water and its four black-backed, fawn-bellied newts, there were *books*.

Books and books and books. The other three walls of the room were shelved and loaded from floor to ceiling, and the volumes that scattered the work bench were no more than a small sample that had been taken out and not replaced. I had never seen so many hard-cover books outside a public library or the town's one and only technical bookstore.

When Marion Shaw returned with Arthur Sandford Shaw in tow I was standing in the middle of the room like Buridan's Ass, unable to decide what I wanted to look at the most. I was in no position to see my own

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes, but if I had been able to do so I have no doubt that the pupils would have been twice their normal size. I was suffering from sensory overload, first from the house and garden, then from Marion Shaw, and finally from that paradise of a study. Thus my initial impressions of someone whose life so powerfully influenced and finally directed my own are not as clear in my mind as they ought to be. I also honestly believe that I never did see Arthur clearly, if his mother were in the room.

Some things I can be sure of. Arthur Shaw made his height early, and although I eventually grew to within an inch of him, at our first meeting he towered over me by seven or eight inches. His coordination had not kept pace with his growth, and he had a gawky and awkward manner of moving that would never completely disappear. I know also that he was holding in his right hand a live frog that he had brought in from the garden, because he had to pop that in an aquarium before he could, at his mother's insistence, shake hands with me.

For the rest, his expression was surely the half-amused, half-bemused smile that seldom left his face. His hair, neatly enough cut, never looked it. Some stray spike on top always managed to elude brush and comb, and his habit of running his hands up past his temples swept his hair untidily off his forehead.

"I'm pleased to meet you," he said. "Thank you for bringing it back."

He was, I think, neither pleased nor displeased to meet me. It was nice to have his satchel back (as Marion Shaw had predicted, he did not know he had left it behind in the park), but the thought of what might have happened had he lost it, with its cargo of schoolbooks, did not disturb him as it would have disturbed me.

His mother had been following my eyes.

"Why don't you show Giles your things," she said. "I'll bet that he's interested in science, too."

It was an implied question. I nodded.

"And why don't I call your mother," she said, "and see if it's all right for you to stay to lunch?"

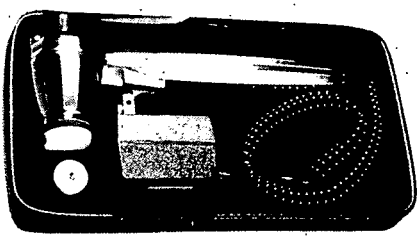
"My mother's dead." I wanted to stay to lunch, desperately. "And my dad will be at work 'til late."

She raised her eyebrows, but all she said was, "So that's settled, then." She held out her hand. "Let me take your jacket, you don't need that while you're indoors."

Mrs. Shaw left to organize lunch. We played, though Arthur Shaw and I would both have been outraged to hear such a verb applied to our efforts. We were engaging in serious experiments of chemistry and physics, and reviewing the notebooks in which he recorded all his earlier results. Even in our first meeting he struck me as a bit strange, but that slight negative was swamped by a dozen positive reactions. The orbit in

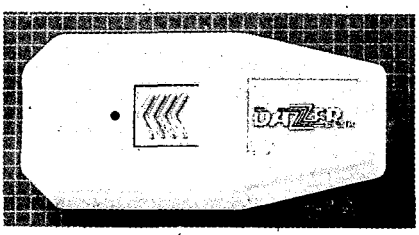
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ TREAT YOUR TIRED MUSCLES SUCCESSFULLY!



The Novafon Sonic Massager from West Germany boasts over one half million users in Europe and hundreds of sports trainers, physiotherapists, and physicians recommend the Novafon worldwide. That's because mixed frequencies of sound (up to 10,000 oscillations per second) penetrate 2¼" beneath the skin to stimulate blood circulation and relax stressed muscles. Made of light metal alloy, and with no moving parts to wear out, it's completely safe. 7½", 8oz. 14" coiled cord extends to 6 ft. Handsome carrying case. 1 year warranty. NOVAFON SONIC MASSAGER **$159.98** ($10.00) #A1869.

▼ THE DAZER™

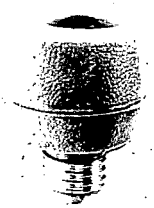


Even the most dedicated canine aficionado can sometimes encounter unfriendly dogs. Dazer™ provides a humane way to repel their advance, emitting ultrasonic sound waves inaudible to humans and totally safe for dogs (unlike mace and other common deterrents). Pocket size (4¾" long) plastic case can also clip on belt; takes 1-9V battery, included. For joggers, hikers, bikers, seniors and kids—plus the proverbial postman. **$29.98**, ($3.00) #A1829X.

▼ ODOR AND STAIN ELIMINATOR

Mother Nature knows a lot about cleaning. In her realm bacteria produce enzymes that devour all manner of organic wastes. Now put this natural cleansing/purifying principle to work in your home. With the pet out system you can eliminate all the stains and lingering odors caused by animal accidents. Also works as a bathroom, laundry and general all purpose cleaner. Works on mildew and perspiration. 2 18oz. aerosol cans of OUT STAIN ELIMINATOR and 2 16oz. squeeze bottles of OUT ODOR ELIMINATOR. **$24.98** ($4.25) #A1881.

▼ TEACH AN OLD LAMP NEW TRICKS

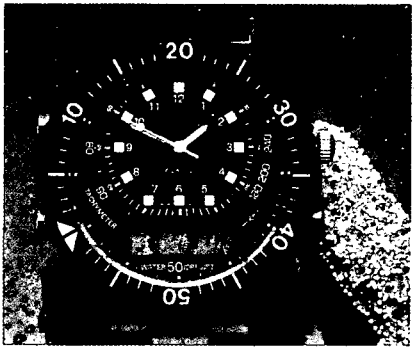


Any lamp that takes a standard bulb can be updated. No rewiring needed-just screw into lamp socket. A touch on any metal part of lamp becomes the "switch". Touch once for low light, twice for medium intensity, a third time for full wattage. Handy entering a dark room, great at bedside and a real comfort to the arthritic or the ill. You save time, money, and electricity. U.L. listed; one-year factory warranty. **$15.98** ($4.00) #A1700.

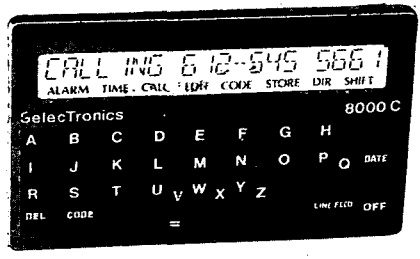
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

▼ DIVER'S WATCH

The Diver's Watch, priced under $50, is rated waterproof to 5 atmospheres (over 150'). The movable bezel, case and band are all "black chrome" plated in a rugged matte finish. Two sunken faces provide fully independent digital and analog timekeeping, so you can set one face to home time and one to travel time. Date, day and month display; alarm; 1/100 second chronograph with lap timer; choice of hourly chime, 12 or 24-hour format. Precision Japanese movement. 1-yr warranty. **$39.98** ($5.00) #A1490.



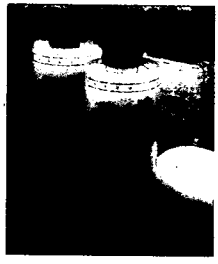
▼ THE SMART CARD


CALL ING 612-545 5561
ALARM TIME CALC EDIT CODE STORE DIR SHIFT
SelecTronics
8000 C
A B C D E F G H
I J K L M N O P
DATE
R S T U V W X Y Z
DEL CODE
=
LINE FEED OFF

It's credit-card sized 3/16" thin, Data Stor™ 8000 works in giant ways. With 8K memory (7951 characters) and 20-character LCD display, it serves as a data bank for notes (with security feature to keep them private), as an electronic directory and an appointment calendar. Its sixteen message alarms can be preset up to a year in advance; a 20-second alarm alerts you to an important call. Handy for recording travel expenses. With 8 mode indicators, all regular calculator functions, time/date, audio-tone keys, on/off switch plus auto-off. Battery included. In simulated leather case, **$49.98** ($4.00) #A1838.

▼ FOOD FOR WOOD

Most of the convenience waxes you buy actually dry out wood instead of nourishing it. What's the alternative? Our choice is Williamsville Wax. It is made of beeswax and lemon oil, heat-blended with other natural oils. It can be used on any type of wood, any type of finish, on paneling or kitchen cabinets as well as fine furniture. Williamsville Wax is super for restoring neglected or mistreated wood. Two 8-oz. bottles cost **$13.98** ($3.25) #A14312.



HOW TO ORDER

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

30 Day Money Back Guarantee For Exchange or Refund

CALL TOLL FREE 24 HOURS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK

1-800-365-8493

Above Number For Ordering Only, Customer Service Call 201-367-2900

We Honor MasterCard and Visa.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc © 1989

If ordering by mail send remittance to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept 020 IA PO Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701 Item price is followed by shipping and handling in ( ) Be sure to add both together to arrive at total price. N.J. residents add 6% sales tax When using credit card — include account number, exp date and signature Sorry, no Canadian, Foreign or COD orders.

1905 Swarthmore Ave Lakewood, N.J. 08701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which I had traveled all my life contained no one whose interests in any way resembled my own. It was doubly shocking to meet a person who was as interested in science as I was, and who had on the shelves of his own study more reference sources than I dreamed existed.

Lunch was an unwelcome distraction. Mrs. Shaw studied me as openly as my inspection of her was covert, Arthur sat in thoughtful silence, and the table conversation was dominated by the precocious Megan, who at twelve years old apparently loved horses and boats, hated anything to do with science, school-work, or playing the piano, and talked incessantly when I badly wanted to hear from the other two. (I know her still; my present opinion is that I was a little harsh in the assessment of eighteen years ago—but not much.) Large quantities of superior food and the beatific presence of Marion Shaw saved lunch from being a disaster, and finally Arthur and I could escape back to his room.

At five o'clock I felt obliged to leave and cycle home. I had to make dinner for my father. The jacket that was returned to me was newly stitched at the elbow where a leather patch had been working loose, and a missing black button on the cuff had been replaced. It was Marion Shaw rather than Arthur who handed me my coat and invited me to come to the house again the following week, but knowing her as I do now I feel sure that the matter was discussed with him before the offer was made. I mention as proof of my theory that as I was pulling my bike free of the privet hedge, Arthur pushed into my hand a copy of E.T. Bell's *Men Of Mathematics*. "It's pretty old," he said offhandedly. "And it doesn't give enough details. But it's a classic. I think it's terrific—and so does Mother."

I rode home through the middle of town. When I arrived there, my own house felt as alien and inhospitable to me as the far side of the moon.

It was Tristram Shandy who set out to write the story of his life, and never progressed much beyond the day of his birth.

If I am to avoid a similar problem, I must move rapidly in covering the next few years. And yet at the same time it is vital to define the relationship between the Shaw family and me, if the preposterous request that Marion Shaw would make of me thirteen years later, and my instant aquiescence to it, are to be of value in defining the road to Stockholm.

For the next twenty-seven months I enjoyed a double existence. "Enjoyed" is precisely right, since I found both lives intensely pleasurable. In one world I was Giles Turnbull, the son of a heel-man at Hendry's Shoe Factory, as well as Giles Turnbull, student extraordinary, over whom the teachers at my school nodded their heads and for whom they predicted a golden scholastic future. In that life, I moved through a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thrilling but in retrospect unremarkable sequence of heterosexual relationships, with Angela, Louise, and finally with Jennie.

At the same time, I became a regular weekend visitor to the Shaw household. Roland Shaw, whom my own father described with grudging respect after two meetings as "sharp as a tack," had a peripheral effect on me, but he was a seldom-seen figure absorbed in his job, family, and garden. It was Marion and Arthur who changed me and shaped me. From him I learned concentration, tenacity, and total attack on a single scientific problem (the school in my other life rewarded facility and speed, not depth). I learned that there were many right approaches, since he and I seldom used the same attack on a problem. I also learned—surprisingly—that there might be more than one right answer. One day he casually asked me, "What's the average length of a chord in a unit circle?" When I had worked out an answer, he pointed out with glee that it was a trick question. There are at least three "right" answers, depending on the mathematical definition you use for "average."

Arthur taught me thoroughness and subtlety. From Marion Shaw I learned everything else. She introduced me to Mozart, to the Chopin waltzes and études, to the Beethoven symphonies, and to the first great Schubert song cycle, while steering me clear of Bach fugues, the *Ring of the Nibelung*, Beethoven's late string quartets and *Winterreise*. "There's a place for those, later in life," she said, "and it's a wonderful place. But until you're twenty you'll get more out of *Die Schöne Müllerin* and Beethoven's Seventh." Over the dinner table, I learned why sane people might actually read Wordsworth and Milton, to whom an exposure at school had generated an instant and strong distaste. ("Boring old farts," I called them, though never to Marion Shaw.)

And although nothing could ever give me a personal appreciation for art and sculpture, I learned a more important lesson: that there were people who could tell the good from the bad, and the ugly from the beautiful, as quickly and as naturally as Arthur and I could separate a rigorous mathematical proof from a flawed one, or a beautiful theory from an ugly one.

The Shaw household also taught me, certainly with no intention to do so, how to fake it. Soon I could talk a plausible line on music, literature, or architecture, and with subtle hints from Marion I mastered that most difficult technique, when to shut up. From certain loathed guests at her dinner table I learned to turn on (and off) a high-flown, euphuistic manner of speech that most of the world confuses with brain-power. And finally, walking around the garden with Marion for the sheer pleasure of her company, I picked up as a bonus a conversational knowledge of flowers, insects, and horticulture, subjects which interested me as little as the sequence of Chinese dynasties.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It's obvious, is it not, that I was in love with her? But it was a pure, asexual love that bore no relationship to the explorations, thrills, and physical urgencies of Angela, Louise, and Jennie. And if I describe a paragon who sat somewhere between Saint and Superwoman, it is only because I saw her that way when I was sixteen years old, and I have never quite lost the illusion. I know very well, today, that Marion was a creature of her environment, as much as I was shaped by mine. She had been born to money, and she had never had to worry about it. It was inevitable that what she *thought* she was teaching me would become transformed when I took it to a house without books and servants, and to a way of life where the battle for creature comforts and self-esteem was fought daily.

I looked upon the world of Marion Shaw, and wanted it and her. Desperately. But I knew no way to possess them.

"It were all one that I should love a bright particular star, and think to wed it, he is so above me," Marion quoted to me one day, for no reason I could understand. That's how I, mute and inglorious, felt about her.

And by a curious symmetry, Megan Shaw trailed lovelorn after me, just as I trailed after her mother. One day, to my unspeakable embarrassment, Megan cornered me in the music room and told me that she loved me. She took the initiative, and tried to kiss me. At fourteen she was becoming a beauty, but I, who readily took the part of eager sexual aggressor with my girlfriends, could no more have touched her than I could have played the Chopin polonaise with which she had been struggling. I muttered, mumbled, ducked my head, and ran.

Despite such isolated moments of awkwardness, that period was still my personal Nirvana, a delight in the sun that is young once only. But even at sixteen and seventeen I sensed that, like any perfection, this one could not endure.

The end came after two years, when Arthur went off to the university. He and I were separated in age by only six months, but we went to different schools and we were, more important, on opposite sides of the Great Divide of the school year.

He had taken the Cambridge scholarship entrance exam the previous January and been accepted at King's College, without covering himself with glory. If his failure to gain a scholarship or exhibition upset his teachers, it surprised me not at all. And when I say that I knew Arthur better than anyone, while still not knowing him, that makes sense to me if to no one else.

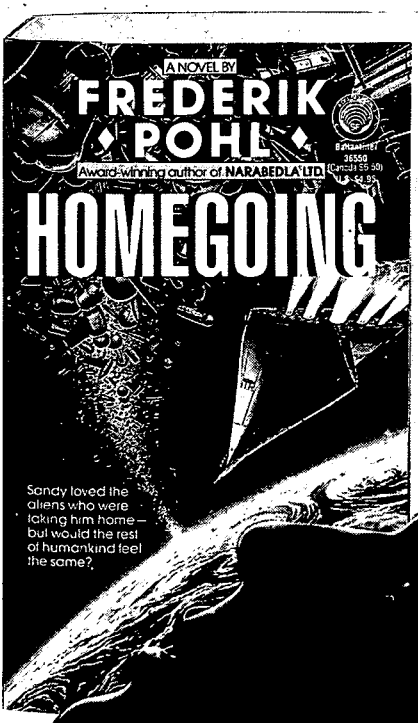
Success in the Cambridge scholarship entrance examinations in mathematics calls for a good deal of ingenuity and algebraic technique, but the road to success is much smoother if you also know certain tricks. Only a finite number of questions can be asked, and certain problems

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sandy Washington was a pretty normal guy—except for the fact that he had been raised by aliens on their spaceship.

The Hakh'hli had done everything they could to give Sandy a normal boyhood. Now they were bringing him "home" to Earth. They had Sandy's—and humanity's—best interests at heart. But the people of Earth were not so sure...

The brilliant new novel of alien contact—finally in paperback!


A NOVEL BY
FREDERIK POHL
Award-winning author of NARABEDLA, LTD.
HOMEGOING
Sandy loved the aliens who were taking him home—but would the rest of humankind feel the same?

On Sale in February
$4.95

DEL REY #1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy
Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

appear again and again. A bright student, without being in any way outstanding, can do rather well by practicing on the papers set in previous years.

And this, of course, was what Arthur absolutely refused to do. He had that rare independence of spirit, which disdained to walk the well-trod paths. He would not practice examination technique. That made the exams immeasurably harder. A result which, with the help of a clever choice of coordinate system or transformation, dropped out in half a dozen lines, would take several pages of laborious algebra by a direct approach. Genius would find that trick of technique in real time, but to do so consistently, over several days, was too much to ask of any student. Given Arthur's fondness for approaching a problem *ab ovo*, without reference to previous results, and adding to it a certain obscurity of presentation that even I, who knew him well, had found disturbing, it was a wonder that he had done as well as he had.

I had observed what happened. It took no great intellect to resolve that I would not make the same mistake. I worked with Arthur, until his departure for Cambridge in early October, on new fields of study (I had long passed the limits of my teachers at school). Then I changed my focus, and concentrated on the specifics of knowledge and technique needed to do well in the entrance examinations.

Tests of any kind always produce in me a pleasurable high of adrenalin. In early December I went off to Cambridge, buoyed by a good luck kiss (my first) from Marion Shaw, and a terse, "Do your best, lad," from my father. I stayed in Trinity College, took the exams without major trauma, saw a good deal of Arthur, and generally had a wonderful time. I already knew something of the town, from a visit to Arthur halfway through Michaelmas Term.

The results came just before Christmas. I had won a major scholarship to Trinity. I went up the following October.

And at that point, to my surprise, my course and Arthur's began to move apart. We were of course in different colleges, and of different years, and I began to make new friends. But more important, back in our home town the bond between us had seemed unique: he was the single person in my world who was interested in the arcana of physics and mathematics. Now I had been transported to an intellectual heaven, where conversations once possible only with Arthur were the daily discourse of hundreds.

I recognized those changes of setting, and I used them to explain to Marion Shaw why Arthur and I no longer saw much of each other. I also, for my own reasons, minimized to her the degree of our estrangement; for if I were never to see Arthur during college breaks, I would also not see Marion.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were deeper reasons, though, for the divergence, facts which I could not mention to her. While the university atmosphere, with its undergraduate enthusiasms and overflowing intellectual energy, opened me and made me more gregarious, so that I formed dozens of new friendships with both men and women, college life had exactly the opposite effect on Arthur. As an adolescent he had tended to emotional coolness and intellectual solitude. At Cambridge those traits became more pronounced. He attended few lectures, worked only in his rooms or in the library, and sought no friends. He became somewhat nocturnal, and his manner was increasingly brusque and tactless.

That sounds enough to end close acquaintance; but there was a deeper reason still, one harder to put my finger on. The only thing I can say is that Arthur now made me highly *uncomfortable*. There was a look in his eyes, of obsession and secret worry, that kept me on the edge of my seat. I wondered if he had become homosexual, and was enduring the rite of passage that implied. There had been no evidence of such tendencies during the years I had known him, except that he had shown no interest in girls.

A quiet check with a couple of my gay friends disposed of that theory. Both the grapevine and their personal observations of Arthur indicated that if he was not attracted to women, neither was he interested in men. That was a vast relief. I had seen myself being asked to explain the inexplicable to Marion Shaw.

I accepted the realities: Arthur did not want to be with me, and I was uncomfortable with him. So be it. I would go on with my studies.

And in those studies our new and more distant relationship had another effect, one that ultimately proved far more important than personal likes and dislikes. For I could no longer *compare* myself with Arthur.

In our first two years of acquaintance, he had been my calibration point. As someone a little older than me, and a full year ahead in a better school, he served as my pacer. My desire was to know what Arthur knew, to be able to solve the problems that he could solve. And on the infrequent occasions when I found myself ahead of him, I was disproportionately pleased.

Now my pace-setting hare had gone. The divergence that I mentioned was intellectual as well as personal. And because Arthur had always been my standard of comparison, it took me three or four years to form a conclusion that others at the university had drawn long before.

His lack of interest in attending lectures, coupled with his insistence on doing things his own way, led to as many problems in the Tripos examinations as it had in scholarship entrance. His supervision partner found him "goofy," while their supervisor didn't seem to understand what he was talking about. Arthur was always going off, said his partner, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

irrelevant *digressions*. By contrast, my old approach of focusing on what was needed to do well in exams, while making friends with both students and faculty, worked as well as ever.

In sum, my star was ascendant. I did splendidly, was secretly delighted, and publicly remained nonchalant and modest.

And yet I knew, somewhere deep inside, that Arthur was more creative than I. He generated ideas and insights that I would never have. Surely that would weigh most heavily, in the great balance of academic affairs?

Apparently not. To my surprise, it was I alone who at the end of undergraduate and graduate studies was elected to a Fellowship, and stayed on at Cambridge. Arthur would have to leave, and fend for himself. After considering a number of teaching positions at other universities both in Britain and abroad, he turned his back on academia. He accepted a position as a research physicist with A.N.F. Gesellschaft, a European hi-tech conglomerate headquartered in Bonn.

In August he departed Cambridge to take up his new duties. I would remain, living in college and continuing my research. When we had dinner together a few days before he left he seemed withdrawn, but no more than usual. I mentioned that I was becoming more and more interested in the problem of space-time quantization, and proposed to work on it intensely. He came to life then, and said that in his opinion I was referring to the most important open question of physics. I was delighted by that reaction, and told him so. At that point his moodiness returned and remained for the rest of the evening.

When we parted at midnight there was no formality or sense of finality in our leave-taking. And yet for several years I believed that on that evening the divergence of our worldlines became complete. Only later did I learn that from a scientific point of view they had separated, only to run parallel to each other.

And both roads led to Stockholm.

When one sets forth on an unknown intellectual trail it is easy to lose track of time, place, and people. For the next four years the sharp realities of my world were variational principles, Lie algebra, and field theory. Food and drink, concerts, vacations, friends, social events, and even lovers still had their place, but they stood on the periphery of my attention, slightly misty and out of focus.

I saw Arthur a total of five times in those four years, and each was in a dinner-party setting at his parents' house. In retrospect I can recognize an increasing remoteness in his manner, but at the time he seemed like the same old Arthur, ignoring any discussion or guest that didn't interest him. No opportunity existed for deep conversation between us; neither

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FULL COLOR GRAPHIC NOVELS

THE NEW DIMENSION

BELL'S THEOREM
Trilogy of Schultheiss
$10.95 ea.
37 62 74
Medical experiment turns nightmare in parallel world

ABOMINATIONS
by Hermann
$9.95
Short horror stories. 80

FIRES
by Mattotti $12.95
Mystical possession ends in expressionist inferno. 48

MAGICIAN'S WIFE
by Charyn/Boucq $14.95
45 Werewolf wife is victim of magic.

FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER
and other Poe tales by Corben
$10.95
13

GODS IN CHAOS and **WOMAN TRAP**
by Bilal $12.95 ea. 49 50
Paris, 2020, Egyptian dieties struggle for power.

MAGIC CRYSTAL
by Moebius/Bati
$6.95
S&S quest for young adults. 67

VULCAN'S FORGE and **THREE SUNS OF VINA** by Leloup
$6.95 ea. 65 76
Teenage heroine in detailed technological sci-fi adventure.

TIME TRAP
by Jacobs $8.95
For all ages. Will he get out alive? 66

MAIL ORDER TO: ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE
Dept. 290, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

You do not need to use this coupon if you need more space

Please send me the graphic novels circled below:

13 37 45 48 49 50 62
65 66 67 74 76 80

Please add $2 postage/handling per book; NY orders add 8.25% sales tax. Please send check/m.o. only. Do not send cash. Allow 6-8 weeks.

TOTAL ENCLOSED: $ _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of us sought one. He never said a word about his work, or what he thought of life in Bonn. I never talked about what I was trying to do in Cambridge.

It was the shock of my life to be sitting at tea in the Senate House, one gloomy November afternoon, and be asked by a topologist colleague from Churchill College, "You used to hang around with Arthur Shaw, didn't you, when he was here?"

At my nod, he tapped the paper he was holding. "Did you see this, Turnbull," he said, "On page ten? He's dead."

And when I looked at him, stupefied: "You didn't know? Committed suicide. In Germany. His obituary's here."

He said more, I'm sure, and so did I. But my mind was far away as I took the newspaper from him. It was a discreet two inches of newsprint. Arthur Sandford Shaw, aged twenty-eight. Graduate of King's College, Cambridge, son of etc. Coroner's report, recent behavior seriously disturbed . . . no details.

I went back to my rooms in Trinity and telephoned the Shaw house. While it was ringing, I realized that no matter who answered I had no idea what to say. I put the phone back on its stand and paced up and down my study for the next hour, feeling more and more sick. Finally I made the call and it was picked up by Marion.

I stumbled through an expression of regret. She hardly gave me time to finish before she said, "Giles, I was going to call you tonight. I'd like to come to Cambridge. I must talk to you."

The next day I had scheduled appointments for late morning and afternoon, two with research students, one with the college director of studies on the subject of forthcoming entrance interviews, and one with a visiting professor from Columbia. I could have handled them and still met with Marion. I canceled every one, and went to meet her at the station.

The only thing I could think of when I saw her step off the train was that she had changed hardly at all since that June morning, thirteen years ago, when we first met. It took close inspection to see that the ash-blond hair showed wisps of grey at the temples, and that a network of fine lines had appeared at the outer corners of her eyes.

Neither of us had anything to say. I put my arms around her and gave her an embarrassed hug, and she leaned her head for a moment on my shoulder. In the taxi back to college we talked the talk of strangers, about the American election results, new compact disk recordings, and the town's worsening traffic problems.

We did not go to my rooms, but set out at once to walk on the near-deserted paths of the College Backs. The gloom of the previous afternoon had intensified. It was perfect weather for *weltschmerz*, cloudy and dark, with a thin drizzle falling. We stared at the crestfallen ducks on the Cam and the near-leafless oaks, while I waited for her to begin. I sensed that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she was winding herself up to say something unpleasant. I tried to prepare myself for anything.

It came with a sigh, and a murmured, "He didn't kill himself, you know. That's what the report said, but it's wrong. He was murdered."

I was not prepared for anything. The hair rose on the back of my neck.

"It sounds insane," she went on. "But I'm sure of it. You see, when Arthur was home in June, he did something that he'd never done before. He talked to me about his work. I didn't understand half of it—" she smiled, a tremulous, tentative smile; I noticed that her eyes were slightly bloodshot from weeping "—you'd probably say not even a tenth of it. But I could tell that he was terrifically excited, and at the same time terribly worried and depressed."

"But what was he doing? Wasn't he working for that German company?" I was ashamed to admit it, but in my preoccupation with my own research I had not given a moment's thought in four years to Arthur's doings, or to A.N.F. Gesellschaft.

"He was still there. He was in his office the morning of the day that he died. And what he was doing was terribly important."

"You talked to them?"

"They talked to us. The chief man involved with Arthur's work is called Otto Braun, and he flew over two days ago specially to talk to me and Roland. He said he wanted to be sure we would hear about Arthur's death directly, rather than just being officially notified. Braun admitted that Arthur had done very important work for them."

"But if that's true, it makes no sense at all for anyone to think of killing him. They'd do all they could to keep him alive."

"Not if he'd found something they were desperate to keep secret. They're a commercial operation. Suppose that he found something hugely valuable? And suppose that he told them that it was too important for one company to own, and he was going to let everyone in on it."

It sounded to me like a form of paranoia that I would never have expected in Marion Shaw. Arthur would certainly have been obliged to sign a non-disclosure agreement with the company he worked for, and there were many legal ways to assure his silence. In any case, to a hi-tech firm Arthur and people like him were the golden goose. Companies didn't murder their most valuable employees.

We were walking slowly across the Bridge of Sighs, our footsteps echoing from the stony arch. Neither of us spoke until we had strolled all the way through the first three courts of St. Johns College, and turned right onto Trinity Street.

"I know you think I'm making all this up," said Marion at last, "just because I'm so upset. You're just humoring me. You're so logical and clear-headed, Giles, you never let yourself go overboard about anything."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is a special hell for those who feel but cannot tell. I started to protest, half-heartedly.

"That's all right," she said. "You don't have to be polite to me. We've known each other too long. You don't think I understand anything about science, and maybe I don't. But you'll admit that I know a fair bit about people. And I can tell you one thing, Otto Braun was keeping something from us. Something important."

"How do you know?"

"I could read it in his eyes."

That was an unarguable statement; but it was not persuasive. The drizzle was slowly turning into a persistent rain, and I steered us away from Kings Parade and towards a coffee shop. As we passed through the doorway she took my arm.

"Giles, do you remember Arthur's notebooks?"

It was a rhetorical question. Anyone who knew Arthur knew his notebooks. Maintaining them was his closest approach to a religious ritual. He had started the first one when he was twelve years old. A combination of personal diary, scientific workbook, and clippings album, they recorded everything in his life that he believed to be significant.

"He still kept them when he went to Germany," Marion continued. "He even mentioned them, the last time he was home, because he wanted me to send him the same sort of book that he always used, and he had trouble getting them there. I sent him a shipment in August. I asked Otto Braun to send them back to me, with Arthur's personal things. He told me there were no notebooks. There were only the work journals that every employee of ANF was obliged to keep."

I stared at her across the little table, with its red-and-white checkered cloth. At last, Marion was offering evidence for her case. I moved the salt and pepper shakers around on the table. Arthur may have changed in the past four years, but he couldn't have changed that much. Habits were habits.

She leaned forward, and put her hands over mine. "I know. I said to Braun just what you're thinking. Arthur always kept notebooks. They had to exist, and after his death they belonged to me. I wanted them back. He wriggled and sweated, and said there was nothing. But if I want to know what Arthur left, he said, I can get someone I trust who'll understand Arthur's work, and have them go over to Bonn. Otto Braun will let them see everything there is."

She gazed at me with troubled grey eyes.

I picked up my coffee cup and took an unwanted sip. Some requests for help were simply too much. The next two weeks were going to be chaotic. I had a horrendous schedule, with three promised papers to complete, two London meetings to attend, half a dozen important sem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WEAR THE FUTURE

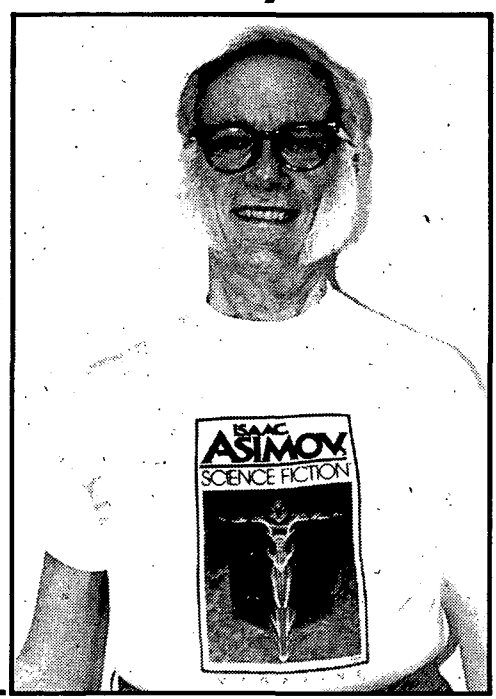
Isaac Asimov's T-Shirts are light years beyond the ordinary!

THE IAsfm T-Shirt features the color artwork of illustrator Joe Burleson. The extraterrestrial image is printed on heavyweight, high-quality fabric. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.

ONLY $7.95

Plus $2.00 postage and handling.
Please specify size and quantity.
Allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery.

IAsfm T-shirt
Davis Publications, Inc.
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017



Please send me _____ IAsfm t-shirts
Please specify size __ S __ M __ L __ XL

Name _____
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Please enclose personal check or money order. No COD's please. New York residents please add sales tax.

Send to: IAsfm T-shirt
Davis Publications, Inc.
380 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inars, and four out-of-town visitors. I had to explain to her somehow that there was no way for me to postpone any part of it.

But first I had to explain matters to someone else. I *had* been in love with Marion Shaw, I told myself, there was no use denying it. Hopelessly, and desperately, and mutely. She had been at one time my *inamorata*, my goddess, the central current of my being; but that was ten years ago. First love's impassioned blindness had long since passed away in colder light.

I opened my mouth to say that I could not help.

Except that this was still my Maid Marion, and she needed me.

The next morning I was on my way to Bonn.

Otto Braun was a tall, heavily-built man in his mid-thirties, with a fleshy face, a high forehead, and swept-back dark hair. He had the imposing and slightly doltish look of a Wagnerian *heldentenor*—an appearance that I soon learned was totally deceptive. Otto Braun had the brains of a dozen Siegfrieds, and his command of idiomatic English was so good that his slight German accent seemed like an affectation.

"We made use of certain ancient principles in designing our research facility," he said, as we zipped along the Autobahn in his Peugeot. "Don't be misled by its appearance."

He had insisted on meeting me at Wahn Airport, and driving me (at eighty-five miles an hour) to the company's plant. I studied him, while to my relief he kept his eyes on the road ahead and the other traffic. I could not detect in him any of the shiftiness that Marion Shaw had described. What I did sense was a forced cheerfulness. Otto Braun was uneasy.

"The monasteries of northern Europe were designed to encourage deep meditation," he went on. "Small noise-proof cells, hours of solitary confinement, speech only at certain times and places. Well, deep meditation is what we're after. Of course, we've added a few modern comforts—heat, light, coffee, computers, and a decent cafeteria." He smiled. "So don't worry about your accommodation. Our guest quarters at the lab receive high ratings from visitors. You can see the place now, coming into view over on the left."

I had been instructed not to judge by appearances. Otherwise, I would have taken the research facility of ANF Gesellschaft to be the largest concrete prison blockhouse I had ever seen. Windowless, and surrounded by smooth lawns that ended in a tall fence, it stood fifty feet high and several hundred long. All it needed were guard dogs and machine-gun towers.

Otto Braun drove us through the heavy, automatically opening gates and parked by a side entrance.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No security?" I said.

He grinned, his first sign of genuine amusement. "Try getting out without the right credentials, Herr Doktor Professor Turnbull."

We traversed a deserted entrance hall to a quiet, carpeted corridor, went up in a noiseless elevator, and walked along to an office about three meters square. It contained a computer, a terminal, a desk, two chairs, a blackboard, a filing cabinet, and a book-case.

"Notice anything unusual about this room?" he said.

I had, in the first second. "No telephone."

"Very perceptive. The devil's device. Do you know, in eleven years of operation, no one has ever complained about its absence? Every office, including my own, is the same size and shape and has the same equipment in it. We have conference rooms for the larger meetings. This was Dr. Shaw's office and it is, in all essentials, exactly as he left it."

I stared around me with increased interest. He gestured to one of the chairs, and didn't take his eyes off me.

"Mrs. Shaw told me you were his best friend," he said. It was midway between a question and a statement.

"I knew him since we were both teenagers," I replied. And then, since that was not quite enough, "I was probably as close a friend as he had. But Arthur did not encourage close acquaintances."

He nodded. "That makes perfect sense to me. Dr. Shaw was perhaps the most talented and valuable employee we have ever had. His work on quantized Hall effect devices was unique, and made many millions of marks for the company. We rewarded him well and esteemed his work highly. Yet he was not someone who was easy to know." His eyes were dark and alert, half-hidden in that pudgy face. They focused on me with a higher intensity level. "And Mrs. Shaw. Do you know her well?"

"As well as I know anyone."

"And you have a high regard for each other?"

"She has been like a mother to me."

"Then did she confide in you her worry—that her son Arthur did not die by his own hand, and his death was in some way connected with our company?"

"Yes, she did." My opinion of Otto Braun was changing. He had something to hide, as Marion had said, but he was less and less the likely villain. "Did she tell *you* that?"

"No. I was forced to infer it, from her questions about what he was doing for us. Hmph." Braun rubbed at his jowls. "Herr Turnbull, I find myself in a most difficult situation. I want to be as honest with you as I can, just as I wanted to be honest with Mr. and Mrs. Shaw. But there were things I could not tell them. I am forced to ask again: is your concern for Mrs. Shaw sufficient that you are willing to withhold certain facts

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from her? Please understand, I am not suggesting any form of criminal behavior. I am concerned only to minimize sorrow."

"I can't answer that question unless I know what the facts are. But I think the world of Marion Shaw. I'll do anything I can to make the loss of her son easier for her."

"Very well." He sighed. "I will begin with something that you could find out for yourself, from official sources. Mrs. Shaw thinks there was some sort of foul play in Arthur Shaw's death. I assure you that he took his own life, and the proof of that is provided by the curious manner of his death. Do you know how he died?"

"Only that it was in his apartment."

"It was. But he chose to leave this world in a way that I have never before encountered. Dr. Shaw removed from the lab a large plastic storage bag, big enough to hold a mattress. It is equipped with a zipper along the outside, and when that zipper is closed, such a bag is quite airtight." He paused. Otto Braun was no machine. This explanation was giving him trouble. "Dr. Shaw took it to his apartment. At about six o'clock at night he turned the bag inside out and placed it on top of his bed. Then he changed to his pajamas, climbed into the bag, and zipped it from the inside. Sometime during that evening he died, of asphyxiation." He looked at me unhappily. "I am no expert in 'locked room' mysteries, Professor Turnbull, but the police made a thorough investigation. They are quite sure that no one could have closed that bag from the outside. Dr. Shaw took his own life, in a unique and perverse way."

"I see why you didn't want Mr. and Mrs. Shaw to know this. Let me assure you that they won't learn it from me." I felt nauseated. Now that I knew how Arthur had died, I would have rather remained ignorant.

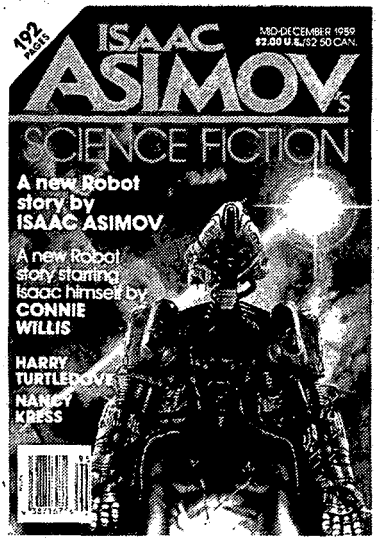
He raised dark eyebrows. "But they *do* know, Professor Turnbull. Naturally, they insisted on seeing the coroner's report on the manner of his death, and I was in no position to keep such information from them. Mrs. Shaw's suspicion of me arose from a quite different incident. It came when she asked me to return Dr. Shaw's journals to her."

"And you refused."

"Not exactly. I denied their existence. Maybe that was a mistake, but I do not pretend to be infallible. If you judge after examination that the books should be released to Dr. Shaw's parents, I will permit it to happen." Otto Braun stood up and went across to the grey metal file cabinet. He patted the side of it. "These contain Arthur Shaw's complete journals. On the day of his death, he took them all and placed them in one of the red trash containers in the corridor, from which they would go to the shredder and incinerator. I should explain that at ANF we have many commercial secrets, and we are careful not to allow our competitors to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THIS YEAR ENTER ANOTHER DIMENSION.



ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND SAVE 32% OFF THE COVER PRICE

CALL TOLL-FREE

1-800-333-4108

☐ Please send me 18 issues of ISAAC ASIMOV'S SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE for only $29.50 —I save 32 % off the newsstand price.

☐ Please send me 12 issues for only $19.97.

Mail to: **Isaac Asimov's**

P.O. Box 7057, Red Oak, Iowa 51591

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

☐ Payment Enclosed ☐ Bill Me

☐ Charge (Circle one) MasterCard VISA

Card# _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Outside US & Poss. 12 for $22.97, 18 for $33.97. (CASH WITH ORDER US FUNDS). PLEASE ALLOW 6-8 WEEKS FOR DELIVERY OF YOUR FIRST ISSUE.

HBSC-0

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

benefit from our garbage. Dr. Shaw surely believed that his notebooks would be destroyed that night."

He pulled open a file drawer, and I saw the familiar spiral twelve-by-sixteen ledgers that Arthur had favored since childhood.

"As you see, they were not burned or shredded," Braun went on. "In the past we've had occasional accidents, in which valuable papers were placed by oversight into the red containers. So our cleaning staff—all trusted employees—are instructed to check with me if they see anything that looks like a mistake. An alert employee retrieved all these notebooks and brought them to my office, asking approval to destroy them."

It seemed to me that Marion Shaw had been right on at least one thing. For if after examining Arthur's ledgers, Otto Braun had *not* let them be destroyed, they must contain material of value to ANF.

I said this to him, and he shook his head. "The notebooks had to be kept, in case they were needed as evidence for the investigation of death by suicide. They were, in fact, one of the reasons why I am convinced that Dr. Shaw took his own life. Otherwise I would have burned them. Every piece of work that Dr. Shaw did relevant to ANF activities was separately recorded in our ANF work logs. His own notebooks . . ." He paused. "Beyond that, I should not go. You will draw your own conclusions."

He moved away from the cabinet, and steered me with him towards the door. "It is six o'clock, Professor, and I must attend our weekly staff meeting. With your permission, I will show you to your room and then leave you. We can meet tomorrow morning. Let me warn you. You were his friend; be prepared for a shock."

He would make no other comment as we walked to the well-furnished suite that had been prepared for me, other than to say again, as he was leaving, "It is better if you draw your own conclusions. Be ready for a disturbing evening."

The next morning I was still studying Arthur's notebooks.

It is astonishing how, even after five years, my mind reaches for that thought. When I relive my three days in Bonn I feel recollection rushing on, faster and faster, until I reach the point where Otto Braun left me alone in my room. And then memory leaps out towards the next morning, trying to clear the dark chasm of that night.

I cannot permit that luxury now.

It took about three minutes to settle my things in the guest suite at the ANF laboratory. Then I went to the cafeteria, gulped down a sandwich and two cups of tea, and hurried back to Arthur's office. The grey file

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cabinet held twenty-seven ledgers; many more than I expected, since Arthur normally filled only two or three a year.

In front of the ledgers was a heavy packet wrapped in white plastic. I opened that first, and almost laughed aloud at the incongruity of the contents, side-by-side with Arthur's work records. He had enjoyed experimental science, but the idea of car or bicycle repair was totally repugnant to him. This packet held an array of screwdrivers, heavy steel wire, and needle-nosed and broad-nosed pliers, all shiny and brand-new.

I replaced the gleaming tool kit and turned to the ledgers. If they were equally out of character . . .

It was tempting to begin with the records from the last few days of his life. I resisted that urge. One of the lessons that he had taught me in adolescence was an organized approach to problems, and now I could not afford to miss anything even marginally significant to his death. The ledgers were neatly numbered in red ink on the top right-hand corner of the stiff cover, twenty-two through forty-eight. It was about six-thirty in the evening when I picked up Volume Twenty-two and opened it to the first page.

That gave me my first surprise. I had expected to see only the notebooks for the four years that Arthur had been employed by ANF Gesellschaft. Instead, the date at the head of the first entry was early April, seven and a half years ago. This was a notebook from Arthur's final undergraduate year at Cambridge. Why had he brought with him such old ledgers, rather than leaving them at his parents' house?

The opening entry was unremarkable, and even familiar. At that time, as I well remembered, Arthur's obsession had been quantized theories of gravity. He was still coming to grips with the problem, and his note said nothing profound. I skimmed it and read on. Successive entries were strictly chronological. Mixed in with mathematics, physics, and science references was everything else that had caught his fancy—scraps of quoted poetry (he was in a world-weary Housman phase), newspaper clippings, comments on the weather, lecture notes, cricket scores, and philosophical questions.

It was hard to read at my usual speed. For one thing I had forgotten the near-illegible nature of Arthur's personal notes. I could follow everything, after so many years of practice, but Otto Braun must have had a terrible time. Despite his command of English, some of the terse technical notes and equations would be unintelligible to one of his background. Otto was an engineer. It would be astonishing if his knowledge extended to modern theoretical physics.

And yet in some ways Otto Braun would have found the material easier going than I did. I *could* not make myself read fast, for the words of those old notebooks whispered in my brain like a strange echo of false memory.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arthur and I had been in the same place at the same time, experiencing similar events, and many of the things that he felt worth recording had made an equal impression on me. We had discussed many of them. This was my own Cambridge years, my own life, seen from a different vantage point and through a lens that imposed a subtle distortion on shapes and colors.

And then it changed. The final divergence began.

It was in December, eight days before Christmas, that I caught a first hint of something different and repugnant. Immediately following a note on quantized red shifts came a small newspaper clipping. It appeared without comment, and it reported the arrest of a Manchester man for the torture, murder and dismemberment of his own twin daughters. He had told the police that the six-year-olds had "deserved all they got."

That was the first evidence of a dark obsession. In successive months and years, Arthur Shaw's ledgers told of his increasing preoccupation with death; and it was never the natural, near-friendly death of old age and a long, fulfilled life, but always the savage deaths of small children. Death unnatural, murder most foul. The clippings spoke of starvation, beating, mutilation, and torture. In every case Arthur had defined the source, without providing any other comment. He must have combed the newspapers in his search, for I, reading those same papers in those same editions, had not noticed the articles.

It got worse. Nine years ago it had been one clipping every few pages. By the time he went to live in Bonn the stories of brutal death occupied more than half the journals, and his sources of material had become world-wide.

And yet the Arthur that I knew still existed. It was bewildering and frightening to recognize the cool, analytical voice of Arthur Shaw, interspersed with the bloody deeds of human monsters. The poetry quotes and the comments on the weather and current events were still there, but now they shared space with a catalog of unspeakable acts.

Four years ago, just before he came to Bonn, another change occurred. It was as though the author of the written entries had suddenly become *aware* of the thing that was making the newspaper clippings. When Arthur discovered that the other side of him was there, he began to comment on the horror of the events that he was recording. He was shocked, revolted, and terrified by them.

And yet the clippings continued, along with the lecture notes, the concerts attended, the careful record of letters written; and there were the first hints of something else, something that made me quiver.

I read on, to midnight and beyond until the night sky paled. Now at last I am permitted the statement denied to me earlier: The next morning I was still studying Arthur's notebooks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Otto Braun came into the office, looked at me, and nodded grimly.

"I am sorry, Professor Turnbull. It seemed to me that nothing I could say would be the same as allowing you to read for yourself." He came across to the desk. "The security officer says you were up all night. Have you eaten breakfast?"

I shook my head.

"I thought not." He looked at my hands, which were perceptibly shaking. "You must have rest."

"I can't sleep."

"You will. But first you need food. Come with me. I have arranged for us to have a private dining-room."

On the way to the guest quarters I went to the bathroom. I saw myself in the mirror there. No wonder Otto Braun was worried. I looked terrible, pale and unshaven, with purple-black rings under my eyes.

In the cafeteria Braun loaded a tray with scrambled eggs, *speckwurst*, croissants, and hot coffee, and led me to a nook off the main room. He watched like a worried parent to make sure that I was eating, before he would pour coffee for himself.

"Let me begin with the most important question," he said. "Are you convinced that Arthur Shaw took his own life?"

"I feel sure of it. He could not live with what one part of him was becoming. The final entry in his journal says as much. And it explains the way he chose to die."

Enough is enough, Arthur had written. *I can't escape from myself. "To cease upon the midnight with no pain." Better to return to the womb, and never be born . . .*

"He wanted peace, and to hide away from everything," I went on. "When you know that, the black plastic bag makes more sense."

"And you agree with my decision?" Braun's chubby face was anxious. "To keep the notebooks away from his parents."

"It was what he would have wanted. They were supposed to be destroyed, and one of his final entries proves it. He said, 'I have done one braver thing.' "

His brow wrinkled, and he put down his cup. "I saw that. But I did not understand it. He did not say what he had done."

"That's because it's part of a quotation, from a poem by John Donne. 'I have done one braver thing, Than all the worthies did, And yet a braver thence doth spring, And that, to keep it hid.' He *wanted* what he had been doing to remain secret. It was enormously important to him."

"That is a great relief. I hoped that it was so, but I could not be sure. Do you agree with me, we can now destroy those notebooks?"

I paused. "Maybe that is not the best answer. It will leave questions in the mind of Marion Shaw, because she is quite sure that the books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must exist. Suppose that you turn them over to my custody? If I tell Marion that I have them, and want to keep them as something of Arthur's, I'm sure she will approve. And of course I will never let her see them."

"Ah." Braun gave a gusty sigh of satisfaction. "That is a most excellent suggestion. Even now, I would feel uneasy about destroying them. I must admit, Professor Turnbull, that I had doubts as to my own wisdom when I agreed to allow you to come here and examine Dr. Shaw's writings. But everything has turned out for the best, has it not? If you are not proposing to eat those eggs . . ."

Everything for the best, thought Otto Braun, and probably in the best of all possible worlds.

We had made the decision. The rest was details. Over the next twelve hours, he and I wrote the script.

I would handle Marion and Roland Shaw. I was to confirm that Arthur's death had been suicide, while his mind was unbalanced by overwork. If they talked to Braun again about his earlier discomfort in talking to them, it was because he felt he had failed them. He had not done enough to help, he would say, when Arthur so obviously needed him. (No lie there; that's exactly how Otto felt).

And the journals? I would tell the Shaws of Arthur's final wish, that they be destroyed. Again, no lie; and I would assure them that I would honor that intent.

I went home. I did it, exactly as we had planned. The only intolerable moment came when Marion Shaw put her arms around me, and actually *thanked* me for what I had done.

Because, of course, neither she nor Otto Braun nor anyone else in the world knew what I *had* done.

When I read the journals and saw Arthur's mind fluttering towards insanity, I was horrified. But it was not only the revelation of madness that left me the next morning white-faced and quivering. It was excitement derived from the *other* content of the ledgers, material interwoven with the cool comments on personal affairs and the blood-obsessed newspaper clippings.

Otto Braun, in his relief at seeing his own problems disappear, had grabbed at my explanation of Arthur's final journal entries, without seeing that it was wholly illogical. "I have done one braver thing," quoted Arthur. But that was surely not referring to the newspaper clippings and his own squalid obsessions. He was appalled by them, and said so. What was the "brave thing" that he had done?

I knew. It was in the notebooks.

For four years, since Arthur's departure from Cambridge, I had con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

centrated on the single problem of a unified theory of quantized space-time. I made everything else in my life of secondary importance, working myself harder than ever before, to the absolute limit of my powers. At the back of my mind was always Arthur's comment: this was the most important problem in modern physics.

It was the best work I had ever done. I suspect that it is easily the best work that I will ever do.

What I had not known, or even vaguely suspected, was that Arthur Shaw had begun to work on the same problem after he went to Bonn.

I found that out as I went through his work ledgers. How can I describe the feeling, when in the middle of the night in Arthur's old office I came across scribbled thoughts and conjectures that I had believed to belong in my head alone? They were mixed in hodge-podge with everything else, side-by-side with the soccer scores, the day's high temperature, and the horror stories of child molestation, mutilation, and murder. To Otto Braun or anyone else, those marginal scribbles would have been random nonsensical jottings. But I recognized that integral, and that flux quantization condition, and that invariant.

How can I describe the feeling?

I cannot. But I am not the first to suffer it. Thomas Kydd and Ben Jonson must have been filled with the same awe in the 1590s, when Shakespeare carried the English language to undreamed-of heights. *Hofkapellmeister* Salieri knew it, to his despair, when Mozart and his God-touched work came on the scene at the court of Vienna. Edmund Halley surely felt it, sitting in Newton's rooms at Trinity College in 1684, and learning that the immortal Isaac had discovered laws and invented techniques that would make the whole System of the World *calculable*; and old Legendre was overwhelmed by it, when the *Disquisitiones* came into his hands and he marveled at the supernatural mathematical powers of the young Gauss.

When half-gods go, the gods arrive. I had struggled with the problem of space-time quantization, as I said, with every working neuron of my brain. Arthur Shaw went so far beyond me that it took all my intellect to mark his path. "It were all one that I should love a bright particular star, and think to wed it, he is so above me." But I could see what he was doing, and I recognized what I had long suspected. Arthur was something that I would never be. He was a true genius.

I am not a genius, but I am very talented. I could follow where I could not lead. From the hints, scribbled theorems, and conjectures in Arthur Shaw's notebooks I assembled the whole; not perhaps as the gorgeous tapestry of thought that Arthur had woven in his mind, but enough to make a complete theory with profound practical implications.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

That grand design was the "braver thing" that he knew he had done, an intellectual feat that placed him with the immortals.

It was also, paradoxically, the cause of his death.

Some scientific developments are "in the air" at a particular moment; if one person does not propose them, another will. But other creative acts lie so far outside the mainstream of thought that they seem destined for a single individual. If Einstein had not created the theory of general relativity, it is quite likely that it would not exist today. Arthur Shaw knew what he had wrought. His approach was totally novel, and he was convinced that without his work an adequate theory might be centuries in the future.

I did not believe that; but I might have, if I had not been stumbling purblind along the same road. The important point, however, is that Arthur *did* believe it.

What should he do? He had made a wonderful discovery. But when he looked inside himself, he saw in that interior mirror only the glassy essence of the angry ape. He had in his grasp the wondrous spell that would send humanity to the stars—but he regarded us as a bloody-handed, bloody-minded humanity, raging out of control through the universe.

His duty as he saw it was clear. He must do the braver thing, and destroy both his ideas and himself.

What did I do?

I think it is obvious.

Arthur's work had always been marred by obscurity. Or rather, to be fair to him, in his mind the important thing was that he understand an idea, not that he be required to explain it to someone of lesser ability.

It took months of effort on my part to convert Arthur's awkward notation and sketchy proofs to a form that could withstand rigorous scrutiny. At that point the work felt like my own; the re-creation of his half-stated thoughts was often indistinguishable from painful invention.

Finally I was ready to publish. By that time Arthur's ledgers had been, true to my promise, long-since destroyed, for whatever else happened in the world I did not want Marion Shaw to see those notebooks or suspect anything of their contents.

I published. I could have submitted the work as the posthumous papers of Arthur Sandford Shaw . . . except that someone would certainly have asked to see the original material.

I published. I could have assigned joint authorship, as Shaw and Turnbull . . . except that Arthur had never presented a line on the subject, and the historians would have probed and probed to learn what his contribution had been.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I published—as Giles Turnbull. Three papers expounded what the world now knows as the Turnbull Concession Theory. Arthur Shaw was not mentioned. It is not easy to justify that, even to myself. I clung to one thought: Arthur had wanted his ideas suppressed, but that was a consequence of his own state of mind. It was surely better to give the ideas to the world, and risk their abuse in human hands. *That*, I said to myself, was the braver thing.

I published. And because there were already eight earlier papers of mine in the literature, exploring the same problem, acceptance of the new theory was quick, and my role in it was never in doubt.

Or almost never. In the past four years, at scattered meetings around the world, I have seen in perhaps half a dozen glances the cloaked hint of a question. The world of physics holds a handful of living giants. They see each other clearly, towering above the rest of us, and when someone whom they have assessed as one of the pygmies shoots up to stand tall, not at their height but even well above them, there is at least a suspicion . . .

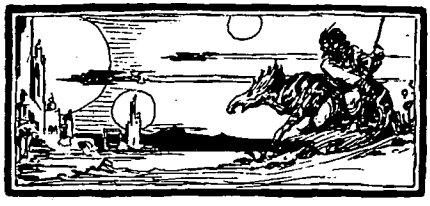
There is a braver thing.

Last night I telephoned my father. He listened quietly to everything that I had to tell him, then he replied, "Of course I won't say a word about that to Marion Shaw. And neither will you." And at the end he said what he had not said when the Nobel announcement was made: "I'm proud of you, Giles."

At the cocktail party before tonight's dinner, one of the members of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences was tactless enough to tell me that he and his colleagues found the speeches delivered by the Nobel laureates uniformly boring. It's always the same, he said, all they ever do is recapitulate the reason that the award had been made to them in the first place.

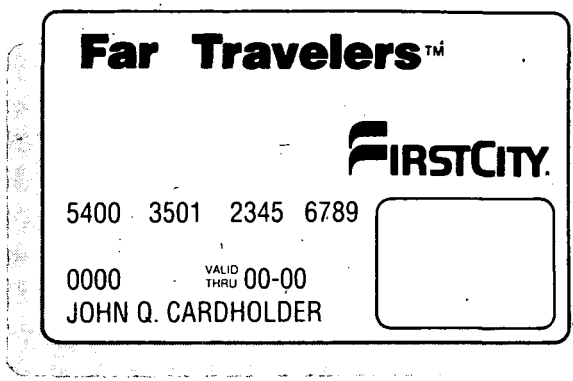
I'm sure he is right. But perhaps tomorrow I can be an exception to that rule. ●

This is a birthday present for Bob Porter.
—Charles Sheffield, February 27, 1989.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Shape of Things to Come



As a reader of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* you are keenly interested in the shape of things to come, our potential futures, and how science and technology will affect the spectrum of human experience.

Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine challenges its readers to speculate beyond the mundane and day-to-day. We want our readers to ponder, question and debate the impact scientific inquiry and discovery will have on the way humans live, relate to one another (as individuals and nations), conserve their environment, and express themselves intellectually and artistically.

The Shape of Things to Come

In a world of mundane credit cards, the "Far Travelers" MasterCard is the only credit card created exclusively for readers of science fiction.

The unique design identifies you as an individual committed to the exploration of human potential.

When you use the "Far Travelers" MasterCard, you will help ensure humanity's continued Far Travels into space because...

Every time you buy something with the "Far Travelers" MasterCard, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* will contribute a percentage of the price to the National Space Society.

The National Space Society is the leading advocacy organization for space exploration. The Society seeks to generate public support for the space program through its education programs, and encourages space-related research by private industry.

The "Far Travelers" MasterCard is the only credit card that enables you to deepen humanity's commitment to the exploration of space.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The "Far Travelers" MasterCard
will serve you well in this world.

- **There's no annual fee for one full year!**
- A competitive variable interest rate of prime plus 7.7%.
- 25-day interest-free grace period on purchases when your balance is paid in full each month.
- Instant Cash at ATMs and bank locations throughout the world.
- $250,000 Travel Accident Insurance at no extra cost.

AND

- **Special discounts on science fiction books and related merchandise.**

First City MasterCard
Terms and Conditions

Annual Percentage Rate for Purchases	17.7%
Variable Rate Information	Your Annual Percentage Rate may vary. The rate is determined by adding 7.7% to the Prime Rate listed in the "Money Section" of the first *Wall Street Journal* published after the 15th of the month preceding the first day of the billing cycle. As of 8/4/89 the rate as determined by this formula would be 18.7%. Under this offer, a maximum rate of 17.7% is guaranteed through 12/30/89.
Grace Period for Repayment of Balances for Purchases	You have 25 days after the statement date to repay your balance before a finance charge on purchases will be imposed.
Method of Computing the Balance for Purchases	Average Daily Balance (including new transactions) method.
Annual Fees	Membership fee: $20.00 per year. Under this offer, the Annual Fee will be waived the first year. At the beginning of the second year, the Annual Fee will be billed to your account automatically
Minimum Finance Charge	None
Transaction Fee For Purchases	None
	Transaction Fee for Cash Advances: $1.50 **Late Payment Fee**: $15.00 **Over-the-Credit-Limit Fee**: $15.00
The disclosures above are accurate as of the date of printing on 8/4/89. These terms are subject to change after this date. Call First City Bank–Sioux Falls, N.A. at 1-800-641-7878 for any changes in the terms disclosed.	

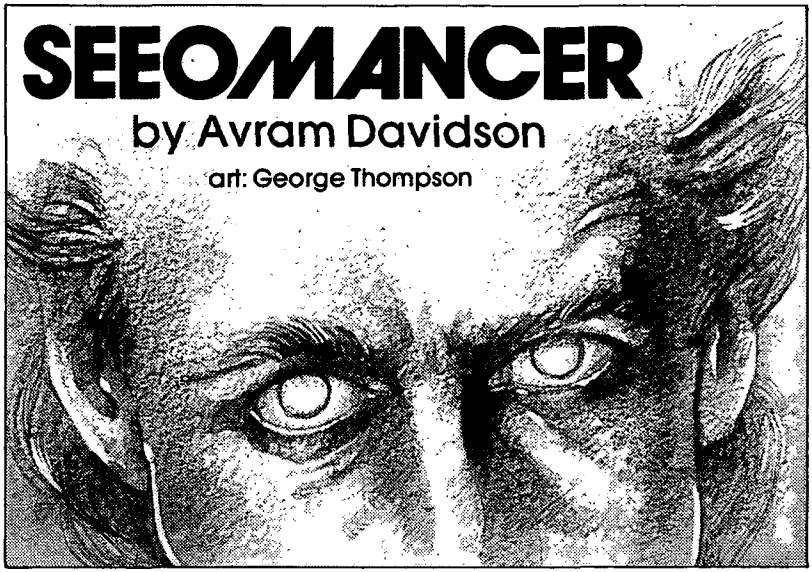
FIRSTCITY.
First City Bank - Sioux Falls, N.A.
If you would like an application,
please call **(800) 641-7878**.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEEOMANCER

by Avram Davidson

art: George Thompson



In his latest piece for *IAsfm*, Avram Davidson relates the tale of a peculiar encounter in an "Absolutely Honest Little Greek Restaurant."

Later it turned out that Francis really did never drink coffee. They had been sitting there, near the Museum, for hardly a minute, just time enough to give their orders. Then this *man* leaned up to the table. "I'm a seeomancer," he said to Annie. Startled and surprised, she was, and was she somehow disappointed too? "I'm a seeomancer," he said, "I see things, mancing." He observed the effect. He took pride in it, he had staked his claim among the ages. "You are Lena's child," he said next. He leaned back, looked at Annie, Shelli, Francis; the man was *very* content. "I see it, I see it. Harry helped raise you when he lived with Lena on 23rd." Came shock, then came a wave of love. Love! "But I was a tiny little child," Annie said. She remembered, past memory, even. *Had* she called him Harry?—or was it Daddy? They were in what Shelli had named The Absolutely Honest Little Greek Restaurant. It wasn't famous or fancy, but it was nice, anyway; and at last they were meeting Francis. Francis was handsome, really, in an odd sort of sleek way: Hungarian, maybe, Annie had thought. Or Argentinian—not that she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew—The hamburgers were almost not quite hamburgers, greaseless, must have been from really lean beef, the grillman had hardly bothered to pat them into shape, they still bore the mark where his clean fingers had torn them out of the mass. Francis showed them his restoration of the Himyaritic text, with his own lettering. It was, in a second, absolutely impressive. "It's better than Ventris," she said on the impulse, meaning it, though barely she remembered reading about Ventris in her cousin's archaeology book at twelve—those odd, *odd* signs!—Francis sat straight, and looked at her, certain in himself of his knowledge, science, craft. "Well," he said, calculating, "it's as *good* as Ventris, I think. And your . . . we're both good artists." It was clear that this time he had not meant himself and Ventris. "But that's apples and oranges," Annie cried. "Still . . . thank you." Shelli meanwhile had been eating, not entirely without sounds, and now she made another sound, sub-speech, announcing, as she waved her free hand for emphasis, that she would say something once she swallowed; *then* the man across the table spoke: the seeomancer: and Francis watched, eyes turning from him to Annie. Later, much later, Shelli was to ask, "Is that really true about Louie—" "—Harry—" "—Harry—he helped raise you? Your mom's boyfriend, then, or what?" But Francis did not have to ask that. He asked, "What do you see, mancing, for us?" The man—had he *known* Harry? no use to ask Lena, her face, first surprised, would turn sullen; she would slam things around, with not a word. "For us, for all of us?" asked Francis—the man considered. "For her, little Annie, I see two books like this," he measured with his hands the size and shape of the *Sketches*. "One already I seen. Now I just now seen another, just the same size. For you, mister, also I seen books: seven books, mister, not very thick, but very deep." Francis went a deep red. "But that's *true*. I have five—no, six, counting the—*six* more notebooks. And I was, I *am*, sure that The Press will publish them as fasicles too—oh, this is *marvelous*, this is like living in the age of Homer . . . well, not *Homer*," he said. "Well, say some centuries later. —*Mar*velous! you've seen what *is*, without full form, but, it, will, *be*." Francis sat back, his rather large flushed mouth a bit open. And of course, at once, Shelli had to move in; and of course, she missed the point, and held out one hand, palm up, stained a bit with condiments (the restaurant had not served the grilled ground beef on buns, but on slices of crusty bread . . . "Rather a nice touch, wouldn't you agree?" —Annie. But Shelli, intent on mustard and ketchup, hadn't answered) "What do you see about *me*, about *me?*"—Shelli now. The man ignored the upturned palm. "I seen the baby," he said, "the one dead. I see another baby, this one lives, but not with you. No more men I see, not the Black one, not the White. Only ladies I see in my mancing: the Black *and* White." Shelli's face slackened, began to tremble. "But *that's* not nice," she said,

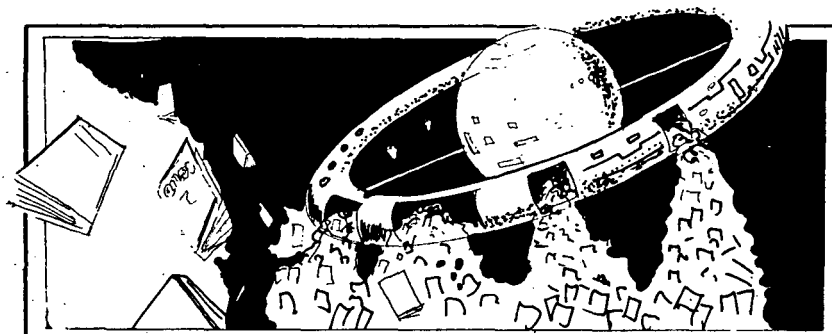
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"that's not nice at *all!*" She put one hand, with the ketchupy fingers, over her face, pushed, flung back the chair, and ran off, awkward and flapping. "Shel-li," Annie called after her. Shelli swung the other hand, up, down, didn't stop, was gone. "She done it herself," the man said. He turned a bit. "So Lena is okay, and she thinks she'll go back, hey?" No one had talked about it, not here. "She ain't happy here, no of course not, and she won't be happy *there,* either. With the other sister, trouble." He nodded his absolute certainty. And Francis said, "But this is *great,* this is *won*derful! Seeomancer. *Sir.* What else do you see, mancing?" The man liked the *Sir.* He shared the proud look with them. "Else I see? I see you thinking sell the house for money to dig the hill in that country, what they called 'the happy,' but is not happy no more. Men with guns I see there, also I see the hill empty." He put his hands flat down on the table. No longer flushed, "Arabia *Fe*lix?" said Francis, almost to himself. "Tel *O*mar is empty? Then I won't—you're sure?—of course you're sure. Then I better not sell the house. I won't sell it. Then . . . " his voice ebbed away. "I see, mancing, but already you know: the two of you. Sometimes the other, she comes a little bit to visit in the house." In a low, assured voice, "But of course," Francis said. He and Annie looked at each other; too soon, quite yet, for even smiles. The man got up. "Mister, I know, here the men don't kiss." Annie moved her arms awkwardly about him, and then the man went away. The waiter came over. Francis stirred. "The man paid," said the waiter. "He paid before you come in. Seventeen seventy-eight, you got two coffees coming." "Two *coffe*es?" Francis asked. "Oh, I never drink coffee." The waiter's face became very slightly troubled, his lower lip very slightly pouted, he consulted an order pad. "*One* coffee, I mean. Lady, you like Greek coffee?" Annie said, "I love it." ●

Connect Your Computer to Asimov . . .

. . . when you join an exciting online service by Quantum Computer Services. We have *IAsfm* online—and lots of science fiction & fantasy fans who want to chat with you. If you own a Commodore®, IBM®-compatiable, Apple® II, or Macintosh® computer, we'll set you up with FREE software and FREE online time to get you started. For information, call **1-800-545-5047, ext. 5158**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WAREHOUSE SALE

Our warehouse is full—full of stellar back issues of *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. That's why we're having our first warehouse sale. For only $9.95 plus postage and handling, we will send you an assortment of 10 classic issues of *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* or *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. That's less than $1.00 per issue, an unprecedented savings.

Please send your check or money order (no COD's please) to:

Warehouse Sale
Davis Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 40
Vernon, N.J. 07462

Please send me

_____ An assortment of 10 issues of *Analog Science Fiction/Science Fact* ($9.95 plus $3.50 postage and handling).

_____ An assortment of 10 issues of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* ($9.95 plus $3.50 postage and handling).

Please send to

Name _____
(Please Print)

Address _____

City _____ St _____ Zip _____

While we cannot accommodate requests for specific issues, we guarantee that you will be delighted with your surprise assortment and will enjoy discovering new stories and authors. Also, at this great price, these back issues will make wonderful gifts for your science-fiction-loving friends.

Available in U.S. only.
All 10 issues will be delivered to you within 6 to 8 weeks.

HBKC-0

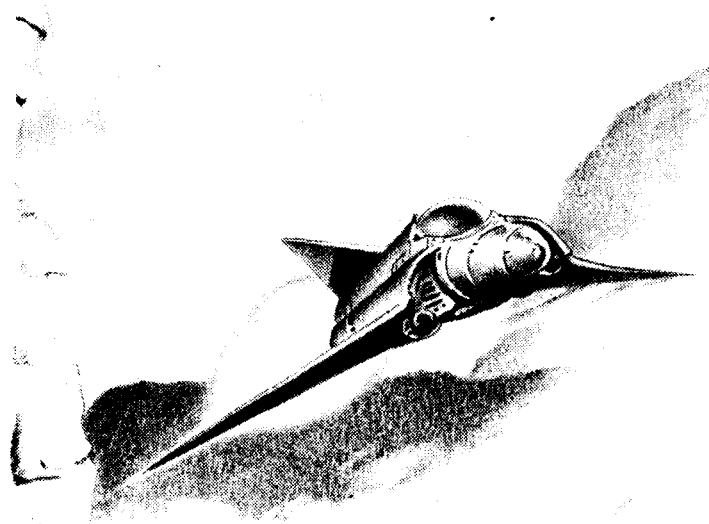
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOYRIDE

by Deborah Wessell

art: Bob Walters

Deborah Wessell is a business writing consultant and a graduate of Clarion West. Her publications include stories in the *Seattle Review*, the *Seattle Weekly*, *Pulphouse*, and the next edition of *Universe*. In her latest tale for *IAsfm*, she offers us a wry depiction of an amusing first contact between human and alien.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNE ONG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Becket Bluegreen didn't mean to kidnap the solitary representative of the first alien species ever to contact the human race. Once she had him, though, it was awkward to give him back—and then later, she didn't want to.

It all started at the Aqua, the best place in New Seattle to win friends and lose money. It was shark night, so the crowd was cooking, gamblers and goodtimers and tourists from all over Startover, with hot music buzzing in everyone's bones and sea monsters gliding by, fast and easy, under the transparent dance deck and over the domes of the game room.

Sharks were old news to Becket. She was busy playing riprap at a table near the bar, trying to win the price of a ticket home off a good-looking young lieutenant from Protection and Purification. The lieutenant was busy trying to impress Lila Never, the most beautiful blonde ever born, and losing pretty steadily. Lila was busy passing Becket deuces under the table and ignoring the lieutenant's meaningful glances.

Then three men walked in, and things got complicated.

Men. Nobody said it, but everybody thought it, from the venerable old senator counting her winnings to the little girl who fed the fish. There were *men* in the Aqua. Not holos on the foreign news, or distant giants glimpsed through the gates of the Terran Embassy, but the genuine article, standing at the bar and talking to each other in outlandish voices. All the women's voices hushed, and even the dance band, Not A Chance, missed a couple of beats.

"Scum!" said Lieutenant Daltic, just loud enough. The band quit altogether. A couple of tourists clutched their kids and edged out the door as one of the men, the tallest one, approached the riprap table.

"Colonel Cirona, Terran Defense and Diplomacy, at your service, Lieutenant. Did you address me?" His English was excellent. It was the official language of all seventeen colonized planets, of course, but ever since the Second Renaissance on Earth, most Terran aristocrats preferred Italian. Cirona bowed an aristocratic bow.

Lieutenant Daltic, her bluff called, hesitated for a moment. Just long enough for Becket Bluegreen to get crazy.

"She was clearing her throat," Becket volunteered, winking one bright blue eye at him from under a tangle of coppery hair. Her other eye was brilliant green, which left Cirona himself hesitating while she stood up, gathered her chips, and cocked an eyebrow at Lila. Lila rose, and the Colonel did a passable imitation of a man swallowing his teeth. Everyone did something of the sort when they first met Lila. She was that gorgeous.

"I'm Becket Bluegreen and this is Lila Ne—um, my partner Lila." No point explaining what Lila never did. Or almost never. "We were just finishing here. Maybe you and your friends would care for a round of chroma?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"How very hospitable of you," said Cirona, not too sarcastically. "Does the house accept Embassy scrip?"

He seemed to lose interest in Lila altogether, which rattled Becket a little. Anyone, even a man, who was more interested in playing chroma than in goggling at Lila had to be some kind of chroma player.

"Ask the bartender," she told him. "She sells the chips."

Cirona bowed again and rejoined his companions at the bar, while the more sophisticated Aqua regulars pretended to stop eavesdropping. New Seattle was getting cosmopolitan, after all. The most recent treaty allowed a hundred Terran men—Terran women stayed home—to occupy the embassy compound as diplomats, traders, and support staff. So some Startovers had seen men before, and a few, including Becket Bluegreen, had even done a discreet bit of not-quite-legal business with a Terran or two. Naturally, every patriotic woman on Startover despised every Terran on principle—Terrans were the repressive past, Startover was the glorious future—but none of the Aqua's patriots was principled enough to go home this early on a Saturday night and miss out on a scandal, or better yet, a brawl. Gambling resumed, and Not A Chance started a torchy slow dance up on the deck. The sharks kept circling.

"You don't care who you gamble with, do you?" sneered Daltic. "You don't care that they're sending spy ships to plan an invasion. Or is it true what I hear, that you actually prefer masculine company? Maybe you're a *mixer?*"

Heads turned along the bar at the crude insult, but Becket wouldn't bite. She was above name-calling, and anyway the last time she'd challenged a Pro she'd gotten pounded.

"I've got nothing against masculine money," she said blandly. "And at least he had civilized manners. Not everyone does . . ."

She chortled as Daltic stalked away, but stopped when she caught Lila's glare. They both sat down again.

"Listen, I'm just going to play one little—"

"Are you out of your mind?" Lila kept her voice to an angry whisper. She was, of course, beautiful when she was angry. "Do you know what people will say if you do this?"

"I know what they say now!" Becket shoved her hair back from her face. "They say I'm a latent heterosexual with integrationist politics. What the hell is there left for them to say?"

Lila bit her perfect lower lip and sighed. "I'm sorry, Beck. It's just . . . what if the Terrans *are* planning to attack Startover? They say a spy ship crash-landed on the Soldi Plateau."

"Malarkey," said Becket. "Even the Terrans don't have enough jumpships to send an army to another planet. And why would they want to? It's cheaper to trade with Startover than to occupy it. Officially they call

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

us perverts, and unofficially they get a good deal on strategic metals." She finished her drink, and then Lila's. "The Pros are embarrassed, that's all. They can't really push the Terrans around, or they might push back. Invasion fever gives them something to do, they get to play soldier instead of cop. They probably crashed one of their own flights and wanted a scapegoat. Come on, I can see the Colonel and his money waiting for us."

Lila took her last shot. "Look, you haven't got enough cash to play chroma. The Terrans will clean you out!"

"Think again, kiddo." Becket grinned and pulled a roll of chips from the hip pouch of her shabby white suit. "Twenty-five reds, Lila, two hundred starts apiece, and not even stolen. Let's go get *rich*."

Chroma, an amalgam of kite-flying and chess, is by far the favorite game of casino owners on all seventeen planets. The stakes are high, the house cut is excellent, and the spiraling patterns of color that rise in hologoraphic splendor above the gamblers make a floor show superfluous. Tourists like sharks, but they love chroma, and they absorb very expensive intoxicants while they watch. At the Aqua that night, everybody watched.

Becket switched to ice water after the first hour of play. Cirona was *good*. His friends—his aides—weren't bad, and Lila was always solid, but as the chips heaped high on the tally table and the complex of colors became a tangled tapestry, the players folded one by one, until only Becket and Cirona were smiling cautiously at each other over their consoles.

She liked him, she decided. His aides, with their odd gait and hairy faces, were hard to tell apart, like the embassy flunkies she had done some deals with, but Cirona had quick eyes in his lean brown face, and he seemed amused by his unorthodox situation. She wondered what he looked like stripped. Or what he felt like. Then she shook the thought and concentrated on the game. It was running against her.

"Do you play chroma a good deal, Citizen Bluegreen?" Cirona's hands moved softly over his controls. He prismed off a violet run, cutting short her blue progression. The crowd sighed.

"Not as often as I'd like, or with such interesting competition." She sent a streak of indigo through the air to block his prism. It was risky; she was short of blues, but she didn't dare let him know it. Lila started to bite her exquisite nails.

"And what's your version of this mystery ship business, Colonel?" Becket inquired, with a sardonic glance at the spectators. It was a dumb question, but as a distraction from her next move it beat knocking over a drink. Barely. "Do you really think you can take Startover, or are you just throwing your weight around?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I never voice my opinions in public," said Cirona, almost smoothly. "So often they are taken for official pronouncements."

"They couldn't be any harder to swallow than the official garbage we've heard so far. Why *did* you people try to land a spy ship on the Soldi Plateau?"

One of the aides lurched from his seat, but Cirona waved him back. While the crowd muttered and jeered, Becket nonchalantly keyed in her strategy, a critical orange blockage. Patriotism had its uses.

"My government has been quite candid in this matter." The Colonel's control was wavering. "We know nothing of a crash landing, in your mountains or anywhere else. If you women weren't so easily swayed by rumor you'd . . . pardon me. That was ill-considered. Citizen Bluegreen, may I suggest that we restrict this game to personal competition?"

"But of course." Becket smiled, casually locking in her blockade. "How inhospitable of me."

The duel continued. Even the musicians, tired of playing to themselves, perched on the edge of the deck and made side bets.

"Well, Colonel," said Becket at last. "It's getting late and I feel like dancing. I'm *so* easily swayed. Shall we make it all or nothing?"

She counted out every last one of her chips and handed them, stack by scarlet stack, to the astonished tallykeeper. Lila closed her eyes and moaned, and one of the aides choked on his beer.

Cirona frowned. He was obviously short of cash, but he seemed to hold the stronger position. Becket could almost read his mind, as he faced the indignity of being bluffed by a woman. *Do it*, she urged him silently. *Do it.* She made herself look cocky, but let her hands fidget nervously behind the console, as if she didn't know he could see them. Sometimes she could even fool Lila this way. *Do it.*

The woven colors floated above Cirona's head, glowing brighter for a moment as the shadow of a shark drifted by. He glanced around the casino. Every woman in it was staring at him. His aides were looking at the floor.

"Citizen Bluegreen, I must presume further upon your hospitality. If you—"

"No IOUs," said the keeper flatly.

"If you will accept it," he continued, "I will meet your wager with a piece of property. I have a small yacht at Portcenter, for personal use during my tour of duty on Startover. It is brand new, absolutely pristine, and worth considerably more than nine thousand starts."

He produced a keycube and held it up; Becket tried not to look dizzy with greed. A yacht. A little diplomatic-style cruiser. She and Lila could go back Northside where they belonged, make an honest living running

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

passengers over the mountains. Or a dishonest one running cargo. Oh you goddesses, stick with me. Hell, gods too. *Anybody.*

"Why not?" she said, and began the play.

As a floor show, the finale of their game was a knockout. As a battle of wits, it was genius. Cirona threw his last reserves of crimson into the air, Becket swept the field with pale shafts of green, he countered with a swath of violet, she deceived him with feints of precious blue. In the end, she took an absurd, an impossible chance with a stab of yellow light, and the game was over.

For one glorious moment there was silence in the Aqua, every face turned upward, every breath held. Silence, and then pandemonium.

"Doubles!" whooped the bartender, "Doubles for everybody! Bluegreen is buying!"

Half the joint took her up on it, Not A Chance blared a triumphal march, and Lila knocked over the table of chips while dancing a jig with the tallykeeper. Becket had a last glimpse of Cirona before she was swept to the bar: his clenched face was a picture of insulted pride. She grinned and waved as his aides led him away, but inside she was flinching.

Becket was always shaky and hollow after taking a big risk. Not like Lila, who got jumpy before a gamble, never after; she didn't stop dancing for the next hour, except to toast Becket and sing with the band. At last she came whirling off the dance deck and fetched up laughing against Becket's table.

"Hey there, Beck."

Lila in repose was an angel, but Lila in a red dress, flushed with dancing and flown with wine, looked like heaven on a Saturday night. Not for the first time, Becket recalled the giddy summer two years before, when she and Lila had been lovers. By autumn Lila's need for solitude and her own roving eye had made a business partnership seem much more sensible. Had it been the happiest summer of her life, or only the most deluded? She shrugged, and leaned close to make herself heard over the music. Lila always smelled like summer.

"South Alley, half an hour. I'll get us a cab to the Port."

Lila frowned and turned away, but Becket knew she'd show up. That was why their partnership worked so well: when in doubt, either one of them would cooperate first and ask questions later. Much more sensible. Much less giddy.

But later, Lila had plenty of questitons. They had left the cab and gone on foot past Portcenter's bright, hectic passenger terminal, heading for the fenced-off landing field for Terran sublight craft.

"Why do this in the middle of the night, Becket? What are you worried about?"

"I just want to move our new yacht somewhere safe, is all." Becket

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

held her breath and fed the yacht's keycube to the field's sentry gate, but it just hummed, spit the cube back and passed them through without a beep. Security was much tighter at the jumpship port farther out of town, but still Becket wondered why there was no Terrans around. "I hope you can fly the damn thing."

Lila snorted. "Did you ever steal anything I couldn't fly?"

"Not unless you count that scow over on—what d'you mean, steal? I *won* it, round and sound!"

"I know you won it," said Lila, "but don't you think cheating a Terran at chroma is pushing it a little, even for you?"

"Cheating! *Cheating?* That was the most brilliant piece of gambling I've ever pulled off in my whole life! *Nobody* cheats at chroma, you know that. I've asked everybody who could possibly teach me, and nobody knows how! I even tried—"

"Becket, shut up and look!" Lila was staring past a clutter of crates and service grounders to a little black teardrop of a ship parked by itself in a pool of worklights. "Is that *ours?* Is that Cirona's yacht? It's an ADk Seven!"

"I take it that's good?"

"Good?" Lila flung her arms wide as if to embrace the ship, then hugged Becket instead. "It is *the* fastest, most versatile AD-class yacht the Terrans ever came out with! It has a Dacres drive! It has—"

"Spare me," Becket implored. "You know I can't follow you when you get technical. Can you fly it or not?"

"Sure! I've slept through all the AD subliminal texts I could find, and anyway they're meant for private owners, not professionals. I could probably even teach you."

"No threats, please. Let's check inside, it's spooky out here. Where *is* everybody?"

"Who cares? What's her name, Beck? Can you translate it?"

Becket peered up at the elegant silver lettering. She hated to admit ignorance. "Let's see, *Enrico Caruso.* It means, um, 'Rich Cruiser.' Roughly."

"Good enough," said Lila. "Let's get onboard the *Cruiser.*"

Onboard was about three times more luxurious than anywhere else they had ever been, including party-crashing. While Lila gazed at the cockpit with an expression that Lieutenant Daltic would have given both arms to inspire, Becket headed aft through an empty but promising galley to the passenger lounge. There were six conforming couches, nicely furry, the latest music and holo gear, and a real wood bar stocked with liquors she'd only heard about and moodies she hadn't.

"I bet these disassemble," she called to Lila, "so we can make a decent bed in the middle."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lila looked in. "They sleep on those? One at a time?"

"Sure. Didn't you know that?"

"I never believed it," Lila said sadly. "Why would anyone sleep alone, if she had other people around?"

"Terrans are sharky. They don't trust each other. They only sleep together for sex. At least that's what I've heard. Anyway, let's get out of here."

Lila ran through a hasty preflight.

"All right, genius among gamblers. Where to?"

"Just off this bloody field, is all I want." Becket strapped down beside her in the cockpit. "How about into the mountains, south of the Soldi, and we'll drop in on Ranni when the coast is clear?"

"Nothing simpler." Lila cleared with Control and made a sedate liftoff. The port became a sparking web of lights, and then New Seattle was shrinking beneath them, glamorized by the double moonglow. Moon One had already set, but Two and Three, the brilliant ones, floated just above the jagged horizon of mountain peaks. Lila sighed. "This is almost as much fun as stealing it straight out. Imagine having our own legal—"

The comm unit chirred.

"Colonel Cirona to Citizen Bluegreen, on the *Enrico Caruso*. Citizen Bluegreen?"

Becket exchanged a startled look with Lila, then fumbled a moment over the unfamiliar panel.

"This is Becket Bluegreen. What do you want, Colonel?"

"Citizen, I must ask you to return immediately to Portcenter." It was a very classy comm unit; she could detect the anxiety in Cirona's mellow voice. "There has been a mistake on the part of my staff. The details need not concern you, but I must have my ship back. I shall reimburse you, of course, with an added sum for your inconvenience."

Lila shook her head vehemently, but Becket ignored her. "What sort of sum are we talking about?"

"Would four thousand starts be satisfactory?" Cirona sounded relieved.

"It might be. Hold on just a minute, Colonel." She paused the unit. "Why *not*, Lila? Money is money—we could buy another ship with plenty left over!"

"Not *this* kind of ship, not on Startover. *Cruiser* is a pilot's dream! And besides, why does he want it back?"

"Who cares? Four thousand starts, kiddo . . . oh, all *right*. We'll keep your new toy." Becket smiled at her partner. Lila was a born flyer; she ought to have her dream.

"Sorry, Colonel, no deal."

"Citizen, I must insist—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No you must not, Colonel. On Startover we don't welsh on our bets. It's a quaint native custom. Get used to it. Out."

She cut the connection over Cirona's angry protest, and they flew on into the night.

"You know, you've got a point," said Becket, after an hour's tutoring from Lila in her co-pilot's duties. "Why would Cirona want the *Cruiser* back so badly? I hurt his pride, but so would paying all that money."

"Maybe he left some fancy cargo on board, something like that?"

"We could check. Has this thing got an autopilot?"

"Of course."

"Kick it in and let's look around."

But the small cargo bay was empty, and the lounge revealed nothing remarkable. That left the galley. The foodstuffs, both bulk ingredients and meals in cooker trays, looked innocent enough. Becket tossed aside a box of veal marsala and twisted a water spigot. Nothing happened.

"I thought that tank was hooked up?"

"It is," said Lila softly.

"Then what do you suppose it's full of, other than water?"

Lila was already tapping at the cycler controls. A bulkhead slid back, revealing a head-high water tank with an unusually large access panel clamped across its front. Becket swallowed, grimaced at her partner, and released the clamps.

The panel held for a moment, then swung out, and a very, very unusual person in Terran uniform tumbled to the deck between them. He had two thumbs on each hand and dark blue hair. He was even prettier than Lila. And he was dead.

"Beck, is he . . ."

"He looks like . . ."

They mumbled stupidly at each other and lapsed into silence. Then the silence was demolished: every computer on board began to shout at them, in English or Italian or both, that the ship was under attack.

"Come on!" Lila scrambled for the cockpit, but Becket hesitated and knelt beside the body. She wondered inanely what color his eyes used to be. As she reached out to touch his hair—it looked as fine as fur—the ship jolted under her and his head lolled sideways. His cheek was clammy. She snatched her hand away and shuddered.

Nobody looks like that, she thought slowly. Nobody on Terra, and nobody on Mars, and—

"Damn your eyes, Becket, where are you?"

That jolted her out of her daze. Lila only swore when thoroughly drunk or truly afraid. One glance at the cockpit explained it. The view through the canopy was all serenity, moonlight on grain fields, but the heads-up display surrounding Lila showed three Protection fighters closing in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

above and beside them. A yellow light blossomed up ahead and the ship trembled.

"Warning shots," Lila said. "Watch the buffer screens for me—if they go over two-ten—and tell the terrain scans to report directly to the levelers. We'll be in the foothills soon. I hope."

"Don't we have any weapons?" Becket demanded, trying to watch everything at once.

"Would you know how to use them if we did?"

"Good point. Then what do we—?"

"*Caruso!*" A Startover voice on the comm stumbled over the Terran name. "This is Lieutenant Daltic of Protection. You are ordered to return to Portcenter at once, to surrender yourself and your vessel, or we will force you down. Acknowledge, *Caruso*."

Another blossom of light, closer. Lila worked frantically over the controls, colored lights wavering across her face and hands. Fragments of transmissions between the Protection ships crackled and faded.

"—not responding, Lieutenant. If they reach—"

"—overstep my authority. They might kill the hostage if we—"

Then a man's voice.

"This is Colonel Cirona, also in pursuit. We have reason to believe they have already killed Major Botticelli. If it is necessary to use force we can assist—"

The partners stared at each other. Cirona?

"That *bitch*," said Becket.

"Beck, we have to turn back. I can't out-maneuver three of them in an unfamiliar ship—"

"Cirona must not have known that the body was on the ship when he bet it. Now he's putting the blame on us! He must have murdered that poor weird person back there—"

"No? Not, ah, not truthly?"

Another man's voice, but without the static. Becket felt the back of her neck go cold as she swiveled in her seat. The man with blue hair was standing behind them.

"You . . . you . . . " The ship bucked, hard, and the portside buffer screen went berserk. Daltic's voice said something dire, but Becket ignored it.

"To explain later?" said the man pleasantly. "You two, you fly? Sufficient to, ah . . . escape?"

Becket continued to gape, but Lila managed to shut her mouth and shake her head: No.

"Ah, I do?" He gestured Lila gently from the pilot's seat—Becket had to look away from all those thumbs—and settled himself in her place.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lila groped her way to Becket and they clung to each other, more for sanity than safety.

"To mountains?" he said, and as the blips on the heads-up converged to a point he spread his hands wide over the controls and smiled.

What followed was the most astounding flight of Becket's life. She had never before been, nor would she ever again be, so utterly, inconceivably airsick. Inside the tiny cockpit, the erstwhile corpse played the controls like so many violins, while outside the horizon did things that her eyes refused to comprehend. Daltic's voice blurred into the cries of *Cruiser's* outraged sensors, the mountains rushed toward the ship, and Becket's stomach tried to meet them halfway. In the end she blacked out, either from acceleration or despair. One moment she was watching glaciers and cliff faces and stars whip past Lila's awestruck profile, and the next she was staring miserably into a bucket containing her last two meals while Lila patted her shoulder and the sun came up.

"Go on, Beck, get it all out. You'll be fine in a few minutes."

"Where—?" she managed to croak.

"We're on a snowfield, about three thousand meters up, just west of Mount Anthony. Close enough to the geothermal zone to confuse their search grid for a while."

"No—where is *he*?"

"In the lounge, learning more English off the library sleeper. Becket, he's an *alien*." Lila paused dramatically, but Becket was still grappling with first impressions.

"He's not dead?"

"No. He says he was in disguise."

"*Dead* is a *disguise*?"

"Aren't you listening? He's an alien! He's waiting to talk to both of us together, but he says he's not allowed to tell us much. We've got to help him, Beck. This is the most thrilling, historic—"

Becket retched. "When am I going to feel better, Lila?"

"Soon, I promise. Come on back to the lounge."

The passenger windows were irised open. As the stranger rose and stepped towards them, he was washed with early sunlight reflected up from the snow. Becket, full of suspicion, questions, and nausea, looked at him and forgot to breathe. He was the loveliest person she had ever seen. His hair was indigo, his eyes the pearly blue of glacier ice, and his blue-white skin looked polished. She wanted to touch it. A lot of it, immediately. Lila coughed.

"Oh. I'm Becket Bluegreen."

"Antonio Alessandro Botticelli."

"Oh."

"That's his name," said Lila impatiently. "Becket, are you all right?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What? Yes."

"It's a Terran name he picked out. I decided to call him Tonio. That's as far as we've gotten."

"Tonio. Wonderful." Becket took a deep breath, sighed, and sat quickly and inaccurately on a couch. "Tonio, what the hell is going on here?"

"I know not 'hell'?" he said. He had a fine tenor voice and a tendency to inflect statements as questions. "Going on, is happen? What happen, men believe they kill me. Women want to kill me. I am ambassador. I need, ah, help?"

"Of course," said Lila.

"Maybe," said Becket. Lila scowled at her. "First of all, where are you from?"

But Tonio, it seemed, couldn't exactly explain where he was from, not with the English he knew so far. He told them the names of his sun and planet: they sounded like oboe music with question marks. Much farther away than Earth from Startover, but "faster in between," whatever that might mean. And he politely declined to tell them where his mother ship was, or who was on it, except that there were females and males both. He did tell them, though it took a while to puzzle out, that his now defunct scout boat, when traveling in what he called "slow space," handled a lot like *Cruiser*. He had been in it alone, and had mistaken Startover for Earth when he made his regrettable crash landing. No damage to Tonio, but the scout boat was pulverized.

"That's some mistake," said Becket suspiciously.

"Systems are very close in fast space?" Tonio said pleasantly. "We know not other, ah, human places. We find . . . message, message device, from Earth only."

"That's right!" said Lila. She was even more radiant than usual. "The Terrans sent out a signal probe, several years ago. I remember the pictures. Imagine, it actually worked!"

"Yeah, imagine," said Becket sourly. "See, Tonio, the Terrans have all the big-time hardware, but there are lots of planets occupied by humans. What's your diplomatic plan for all of them?"

The pearly eyes blinked in confusion.

"Never mind, go on with your story."

The story was that Tonio been picked up by Colonel Cirona in the *Cruiser*, only to be hidden away at the Terran Embassy for a week of intensive questioning. But Tonio didn't enjoy being hidden away, and had told the Colonel very little. When the questions became too intense, he had feigned illness and death. ("Most easy to do.") Cirona knew the mothership would come searching for their ambassador, and decided to deflect any blame onto Startover by planting the corpse on a senior senator due in New Seattle in a few days.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Very neat," Becket commented. "We get the blame, there's political chaos, so the Terrans step in. Cirona gets to be governor of a new colony *and* negotiate with the mothership. What a career move."

But the plan had gone awry when Protection took advantage of the Colonel's night out to make a spot search of the embassy for evidence of an invasion plot. While they marched in the front gate, an overly clever Terran officer slipped out the back and stashed Tonio on the colonel's yacht, just before all the Terrans had to report back to the embassy for a head count.

"That's why there were no guards!" said Lila.

The *Cruiser* must have seemed a perfect hiding place—until it took off. So here was the corpse, his English improving by the minute. Tonio seemed quite pleased with the results of his ruse, and, indeed, with everything else. He had a wonderful smile.

"So what do you want from *us?*" Becket asked, trying to think and lust at the same time.

"I must . . . return? Return to Soldi. There is, ah, device. I drop, dropped the device, for communicate with others of me? Others like me."

There was more puzzling through, until Becket and Lila understood: just before the crash, Tonio had ejected some sort of homing beacon to signal his mother ship. But he could tell that the beacon wasn't transmitting properly—at this point he showed them some circuitry implanted under his left eyelid, and Becket almost threw up again—so he had to find it and correct its signal.

"And then what?" asked Becket.

Tonio looked from her to Lila and back, and smiled some more. "What you to expect? My ship will come, we will speak friendship, trade, diplomatic things. I am alien ambassador. Ah, please, I know not what are you?"

Good question: what *were* they? How do you explain casino cons to an envoy from the stars? The partners looked at each other blankly, as Becket realized two truths: that this was indeed a historic moment, and that she wasn't up to it. She, Becket Bluegreen, nobody in particular, could affect the entire future relationship of two stranger races. She could determine the destiny of seventeen human-occupied planets, and countless alien others. She could be a hero.

Or she could slide one hand around to the small of Tonio's back, yank him close, and see what happened. Lila wouldn't mind, or maybe she *would*, but—

The talker board pealed insistently from the cockpit. In her captain's voice, Lila said, "I told the talker to grab any news about us. Tonio, we need to start the water system. Would you fill that tank you came in with snow?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Of course! I am . . . happiness? To help?"

"Becket—?"

"Coming."

They tapped into the news live and then played back the recorded part. It was a riveting broadcast. In the few hours since they'd parted company with Lieutenant Daltic, the Terran Embassy had announced the kidnapping and possible murder of an important officer, the Startover Senate had accused the Embassy of overreacting to distract attention from the Soldi mystery ship, Protection was searching for the kidnappers while mobilizing its reserve units in the event that the whole episode was a Terran plot, and the Bishop of Newer York had announced that she would pray for the kidnappers' immortal souls.

Becket gazed out the cockpit canopy to where Tonio was scooping snow.

"And that's just the public stuff," she said airily. "Heaven only knows what any of them actually means to *do*. Except the bishop, I suppose."

"Except for us," Lila said. "We mean to help him. Don't we?"

"If you mean help him, as in dumping him somewhere near a town and running like hell, yes. If you mean help him, as in anything else, no."

"We can't just—"

"Lila, you see this? It's my body. It's the only one I've got, and I plan to enjoy it for a while. I don't care what Tonio says about knowing the coordinates, that damn transmitter could be anywhere between here and the Pole. It could take *weeks* to find. Meanwhile, you heard the broadcast. If Cirona finds out Tonio's still alive, he'll have to get rid of us to cover up his scheme. And Protection is so trigger-happy already, racing around searching for spies, if they get one look at Tonio we're compost."

"But what happens to Tonio if we abandon him? You said yourself, half of Startover has invasion fever already. People will think he's a Terran spy—he won't stand a chance!"

"All right then, we'll leave him somewhere deserted, like here for instance, and send an anonymous message explaining where he is."

"And who do we send it to? The Terrans or the Senate? Who could we trust with him?"

"*I* don't know! I thought *we* were the crooks here. How'd we get to be the good guys? I don't like it!"

"Becket, you're whining."

"Of course I'm whining! That's what cowards *do* in situations like this!" She stamped into the lounge and leaned against a window. Tonio was down at the lower hatch, loading the snow. As she watched him, thinking cowardly thoughts, a glacier hawk swept overhead like a crimson blade. He gazed up at it, wide-eyed, then saw her at the window and smiled.

She felt her blood shift. Rumors to the contrary, she'd never had a man

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

before. But Tonio *wasn't* a man, was he? He was a gift from the sky, serendipity . . .

"Becket, listen to me. This is tremendously important." Lila joined her at the window. "Another race of people, coming to meet with us. It will change everything! And even if you don't care about all that, Tonio is an innocent person in danger, and—"

"And he's got outrageous pheromones."

"Becket!" Lila stepped back and stared. "You *can't* be serious."

"Well, he's got *something!* Holy mother, Lila, just looking at him uncorks my blood pressure, I can imagine what actually—"

"Beck, he's a *man.* And an *alien!*"

"Nobody that gorgeous is alien to *me,* kiddo." Becket turned reluctantly from the window and grinned at her. "You really don't feel even a little—?"

"Of course not!"

"Lila Nearly Never . . ."

"And Becket almost always." It was an old joke between them, and Lila laughed, but she wouldn't give up. "We're going to help him, aren't we, Beck?"

"Are we?" Becket tried to feel heroic, but it wouldn't take. "There must be some other—GET DOWN!"

Cirona had appeared behind Lila's back. Becket shoved her out of the line of fire, but Cirona didn't react because he wasn't really there. It was only an image, about half life-size, hovering in the air above a couch, fainter and then more vivid. Cirona was sitting at a desk, or as much of one as his projector could scan, with a bland, courteous look on his face.

"Where's our projector?" Becket whispered, looking around the lounge. Not that she needed to whisper. Cirona would only hear them if they transmitted a holo themselves. Lila pointed to a sophisticated little holobox embedded in the bar.

"Don't touch it," she said. "He might trace us if we answer."

As if on cue, the colonel spoke.

"Citizen Bluegreen?" he said, gazing at the air over Lila's head. "This is a non-traceable diplomatic channel, protected at both terminals. We need to discuss this situation privately. Please respond."

"Lila, is he lying?"

Lila disappeared into the cockpit briefly, then returned. "I don't think so. Should we risk it?"

Becket drummed her fingers on the bar. "I think we have to. We can't sit here forever, we need more information. And I don't think he'll inform on us to Protection. But while I dicker, you get the ship ready to pull out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fast, all right? And close these windows for me. No point showing him the landscape."

Lila complied, and Becket cued up the box and positioned herself for projection. She had only used a private holo once or twice, and she felt an absurd sense of stage fright. Then Cirona's image looked straight at her.

"There you are, Citizen! Excellent. It's always wise to negotiate when one is losing the endgame."

"This isn't chroma, Colonel," she snapped. "And we have the only ace in the game."

"To be sure." Cirona smiled. "I had assumed Ambassador Botticelli was still alive, from the way *Caruso* was flying, but thank you for confirming my assumption. I'm delighted, of course. By the way, I hope you are taking proper care of my vessel."

Becket flushed. "You mean *our* vessel. You lost it and you lost your corpse. You people really bungled this little scheme, didn't you?"

But Cirona only shrugged. "What's done is done. My only concern now is the ambassador's safe return to my embassy, so that the Terran government can welcome him properly and open relations with his people."

"And I suppose you want to be cleared of murder charges? Attempted murder, I mean."

Cirona shook his head. "No need for melodrama, citizen. We meant no harm to the ambassador, you know that. And you know he will be safer with us, or on a jumpship to Earth, than left here to the tender mercies of your military. Your most influential senators are very nearly convinced that the ambassador is spearheading an invasion, with your traitorous assistance. You three will undoubtedly be killed on sight."

He was right, Becket knew in her shivering bones he was right. Even if Tonio could conjure up his mother ship, Protection would assume it was a Terran attack and start a war. But if Cirona took over, Tonio's people would be manipulated into favoring Earth. She tried to keep a chroma-face. "We'll explain the truth to them. They'll listen."

"To a pair of petty criminals, one of them a suspected heterosexual? Come now." His voice hardened, just for a moment. "This is a matter of highest import to all humanity, Citizen. If you have any sense of honor at all, you will release the ambassador to me, and stay out of affairs which are beyond you. We can pay you quite well, of course."

Exactly how well? Becket wondered automatically. Then shame spurred her to anger. *Buy* Tonio from her, as if he was just a stack of chroma chips and she was just another casino cheat?

"I'll see you in hell first," she told the hovering image. "Lila and I have just as much right to be in on this as you do! We'll show you honor, you scummy—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She choked on the words, then jabbed at the holobox to cut the connection and bar incoming signals.

"Lila!"

"Right here." Her partner was beaming at her from the passageway. "I've got Tonio's coordinates keyed in. I'm proud of you, Beck."

"Save it for after we survive this stupid mess, *if* we do, which we probably won't, and even if we do—"

"Becket, dear heart?"

"What?"

"Shut up and strap down."

"There," said Lila.

Far beneath *Cruiser*'s wings, the sea glittered around a spill of tiny islands. Up ahead, minutes away, a scalloped coastline of sheer cliffs rose impossibly high and level, catching the late afternoon sun like a golden wall. The Soldi Plateau.

"About time," Becket grumbled, yawning hugely and trying to smooth out the shambles of her best suit. Now her only suit. "Did we have to swoop around so much? I hate sleeping and flying."

"You hate flying," Lila retorted. "And it's called evasive action, not swooping around. Which is why they haven't tracked us yet."

"You hate *flying?*" Tonio made an oboe note of astonishment. He hadn't been to bed at all, much to Becket's regret, but his eyes were still ice-bright, and Lila, still in her red dress, looked more like the life of a party than a fugitive from one. The two pilots leaned towards each other and laughed. Becket was not amused.

"Tonio's been teaching me to fly without the levelers," Lila said.

"She learns so fastly!"

"Doesn't she though," said Becket. "Must be that objective, impersonal attitude of hers. Just keep it up, Lila. No telling what you'll learn."

Lila shot her partner a sharp look, but the controls were calling. She guided *Cruiser* in a wide arc toward the plateau, a vast tabletop of grass and tumbled stone with walls that dropped hundreds of meters to the thrashing waves. Tonio was confident that his transmitter was there, on one particular promontory. Becket watched her partner pull off a sweet pinpoint landing, and fretted about Tonio's effect on herself. Lust was all very well, but jealousy was just ugly. She sighed and went off to prepare for their search.

The search took just until dark. Up close, the promontory was a rough and hummocky tabletop, with narrow brushy gullies that angled away from their landing spot and ended at the cliff edge.

"Tonio," Becket asked, as they quartered the ground while Lila stood

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sentry in the cockpit, "Tonio, are you sure it's here? It could have fallen into the sea, or broken on the rocks."

"Why?" He was unfailingly cheerful, and unfailingly pretty, with his smooth blue hands parting the coarse grass and the wind tousling his indigo hair.

"Why what?"

"Why would device fallen or broken? A good device, mine."

Becket pondered this for a moment, then yelped as she stepped on a jagged little rock. But it wasn't a rock, it was a transmitter that looked like a rock, that cooed like a pigeon when Tonio picked it up, and that sparkled like a star when he held it to his left eye.

"Fix now," he said brightly. "Message is going."

"Can I take a look at that thing?"

Becket reached for the gadget, but Tonio squashed it in his two-thumbed hand and tossed it over the cliff.

"Used, no more to use," he said. He had a new expression, one she couldn't read. "Now to wait."

Becket hadn't counted on the waiting, but of course a starship can't be called like a cab. Tonio told her it might be days. The sun went down in glory, the moons rose, and Becket paced the lounge, picturing every possible disastrous outcome of their foolhardy behavior. Cirona would find them, kill her and Lila and steal Tonio. Protection would arrive first, kill Tonio and jail her and Lila. Tonio's ship would arrive and kill everyone. Becket would kill herself out of thwarted longing for Tonio's skin.

"It seems to me." she whispered to Lila as Tonio wandered out to the galley, "it seems to me that as long as we're doomed anyway I could at least *ask* him about sex on his planet. Just for information."

"It seems to *me*," said Lila in her captain's voice, "that you should go pace outside and control yourself."

"*Control* myself?" Becket's voice skidded high. "I'm cooped up with the two prettiest people on the planet and going to die soon, and you want me to *control* myself?"

Twenty-four hours of gambling, airsickness, bravado, and lechery suddenly took its toll on Becket's equilibrium. She cursed Lila, and Tonio, and everyone else from Colonel Cirona to the Bishop of Newer York, and ended by grabbing up a bottle of Madeira from the bar and heaving it dead center into the largest lounge window. Neither was breakable, of course, and the bottle rebounded like the clapper of a bell and gave her a nasty bash on the knee. She collapsed howling on a couch, then saw Tonio standing wide-eyed in the doorway with a box of food in his hands.

"Outside," Lila said. "We'll call you for dinner."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Outside, the moonlight was frosting the gold grass, and sliding over the sea like quicksilver. As she limped along and her rage receded, more optimistic pictures floated through Becket's mind . . . a vast, magnificent alien starship, full of delightful variations on Tonio. The females would be delightful, she was sure, but could there really be a whole population of males as delectable as he was? Anyway, the vast ship, the delightful crew, the joyous reunion with their cherished ambassador, the first official meeting with humans . . . and then what? Protection's paranoia pulling the trigger? Cirona's scheming? Were the humans in charge of humanity equal to this historic moment, anymore than Becket had been?

Her musings were interrupted by a foreign aroma on the sea breeze: veal marsala. How long *had* it been since they'd eaten? Suddenly ravenous, Becket headed inside for the lounge and nearly toppled Tonio as he carried in eight or nine dishes of food, some of it recognizable. His thumbs made him an outstanding waiter. Lila had pulled couch cushions into a circle and was reclining on them, half-asleep. Becket sighed with regret, remembering the first time Lila wore that red dress. She helped Tonio set down the food, and sighed again over those lovely blue hands. Even his thumbs looked good to her now.

"Warm in here," she muttered.

"Concentrate on dinner," said Lila, and moved closer to Tonio.

"You too, partner," Becket replied, remembering their laughter in the cockpit. "Or are you hungry for foreign food yourself? Getting over your allergy to exotic dishes?"

Tonio looked confused. "Lila is ill?"

"Not as ill as Becket," Lila said. "She's light-headed because of her huge appetite for—ow!"

Becket had thrown a tortellini at her. She returned the fire with a rice cake, which Becket batted aside. It landed in Tonio's lap and he laughed uncertainly. Becket couldn't resist tossing another one at him, but she missed his reaction while dodging a volley of olives. Lila was giggling dementedly, prey to the same nervous strain that had touched off Becket's tantrum. She bounced an olive off Becket's nose, and suddenly everything seemed very funny.

"En garde!" yelled Becket, using a cushion as a shield and loosing a salvo of little fried things, some of which stuck artistically to the window behind Lila's head. Lila laid down a barrage of curried shrimp and the battle was on, filling the air with provender and hilarity, until the ammunition was exhausted and the combatants laid back on their pillows for a moment of breathless truce.

Tonio sounded an abrupt flourish of oboe notes: he had gotten the joke. Scorning conventional weaponry, he dipped up a spoonful of pomegranate pudding and flicked it deftly at Lila. It landed with a soft splat between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her breasts and trembled there, glistening. . . . Becket watched it rise and fall with each breath, pink against the fair skin and red silk. No one spoke. She could hear the wind and the boom of waves on rock, and three people breathing. Memories of Lila's body under her hands flooded her mind, and she could see the same memories in Lila's eyes.

They both looked at Tonio.

"Ah," he sighed. "Please."

He leaned forward gracefully, supporting himself with a hand on Becket's thigh, and licked away the pudding.

That did it. Clothes, dishes, and curried shrimp went flying, blue hands and white shoulders and one black-and-blue knee flashed in and out of the moonlight that poured through the window spattered with little fried things, and Becket tumbled through the most confusing, rapturous series of sensations she had ever felt. She thought she would never catch her breath, she thought Tonio was like flying away and Lila was like coming home, she stopped thinking at all. She shared Lila with Tonio, she and her partner devoured him, she fought them both off and then surrendered. Everything happened at once but very slowly, and then nothing was happening at all and she was listening to waves on rock and three people breathing.

"What was that?" Tonio asked politely, sitting up.

"What was what?" Becket nestled deeper among the cushions.

"That . . . contraction? Of muscles? That you did very soon and then again after we—"

"I, um, had an orgasm. Or two."

"*Very* pleasant," he said. "Do again, please?"

"Not right this minute, no."

A disappointed oboe riff.

"Maybe later."

Another riff.

"Sorry."

Tonio shrugged, a complicated gesture involving most of his body. Becket was watching him and framing an anatomical question of her own when Lila spoke up from where she lay smiling at the ceiling.

"Tonio? *I* could . . . that is . . ."

"You do also?" he said. "Just as Becket?"

"Sure she does, kid." Becket shoved him in the right direction. "You were just too busy to notice. By the way," she told him drowsily, nestling again, "I like your earrings. I meant to tell you."

"Thank you. I like your eye? The green one?"

"Thank *you*," she said, and slept.

Later on, Becket always wished she had stayed awake that night, just to be with Tonio before the end. It seemed only moments, but it must

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have been several hours after she snuggled into the curve of Lila's waist, cheek to cheek with Tonio, that a strange light disturbed her. It was Tonio's left eyelid, glowing orange.

"Yes!" he said, "yes!" And for the next ten minutes spoke nothing but rapid-fire oboe. By the time he and his eyelid calmed down it was almost sunrise, the women were up and dressed, and Lila had triple-checked the automatic scanners in the cockpit.

"I don't see anything alien coming in," she said, "but I guess Tonio would know. There's a distant signal that could be Protection. Or Cirona, I suppose. Your people had better hurry, Tonio."

"We are soon here," Tonio said, in a faint, sad voice. "*They* are soon here. But I am they? I am not you."

Becket looked at him blankly, then understood.

"Well, you do belong with your people, Tonio. But we three sort of belong together now, too. And we'll stick with you when your ship gets here, you know. We won't abandon you."

"Abandon?" he said. "Abandon is run away?"

"Yeah."

Tonio gave Becket and Lila a long blue look.

"*I* abandon you," he said, and moaned an oboe moan. "The ship does not come? I go. It was lie."

"What was, Tonio?" Becket guided him to the couch and they all sat down. I don't want to know this, she thought. I'm sure I don't.

"Ambassador was lie," Tonio said faintly. "Diplomatic talk, lie? I cook."

"We know you can cook," Lila said, patting his hand.

"I *am* cook," said Tonio.

They stared at him.

"I said ambassador for safety?" he went on. "Perhaps cook is not important, is killed? Ambassador is important. Everyone help ambassador."

Becket made a strangled noise.

"But how did you get here in the first place?" asked Lila. She touched his hand, but the blue thumbs closed in a fist.

"I pilot the boat—race boat, not scout boat—for pleasure. Against rules? Mal . . . malfunction engine? Boat fallen and broken." He looked at them miserably. "A lie to you, my Becket, my Lila."

Becket was torn between laughter, tears, and murder.

"You're a ship's *cook*," she said. Her voice kept breaking. "You were joyriding and you crashed. And now you've got half the planet chasing us. And your ship is about to land and start a war. Over a cook. A *cook*."

Tonio nodded yes, then shook his head an emphatic no.

"Ship does not come," he said. "We do not come to humans for long time? Most long? This was . . . mistake? I go back only."

They sorted it out then. The transmitter was a distress call, but Tonio

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be picked up—how, he couldn't explain in English. There would be no landing, and in fact Tonio's people planned no contact with humanity until far in the future. If ever.

"But I will tell about *you*," he said. "You two."

He looked so mournful, and so beautiful, that Becket was ready to hit the cushions all over again. And she had a sudden vision of Tonio reporting back to his superiors and talking with his friends, not in this sweet broken English, but with his own musical eloquence. Telling stories about the aliens. She wanted to tell him everything about the human race, all at once, but the talker board started shouting and his eyelid started glowing and they never had another quiet moment.

"Protection fighters!" Lila read off the scanners as they crammed into the cockpit. "And a Terran ship going much faster than it should be able to. It's going to beat them here, and we can't outrun it."

"Cirona." said Becket. "Listen, Tonio, it's going to be raining alloy around here in a minute. Maybe we should—"

But she said it to his back. Tonio ran out of the *Cruiser* and into the dawn. Becket tried to follow him, but Lila caught at her sleeve.

"Sit down, partner. He has to go home."

They couldn't take off with Tonio so close, and anyway they couldn't bear to lose a last sight of him, so they sat and watched through the cockpit canopy. Later on, they weren't sure what they had seen. A large *something* fell quite slowly from the sky. Tonio ran over to it and fiddled with some long rods and fanned out some glinting sheets. Then there was a long low vibration, like a thousand oboes, and Tonio got inside the something, wrapping it up around him, like petals closing. It lifted off the ground, hovered, then sped out over the sea on a perfectly flat trajectory, across the flaming disk of the sun, and vanished before they ever saw it rise.

"But it must have gone up eventually," said Lila. "His people must be up there somewhere, pulling in his life preserver."

"Later," said Becket, staring at the scanners. "We'll talk about it later. Cirona will be here in two minutes."

What could they do in two minutes? Becket ran a hand through her hair. If they ran, they'd be shot down. If they didn't, they'd end up in prison, or worse. Time to face facts.

"Lila?"

"Right here."

They didn't look at each other.

"Lila, I know *I* was the one who made it business partners only, and I know I'm not good at monogamy, not that I'm going to have a chance to fool around much in solitary confinement, but I do love you, and if we ever get out of this, which we *won't*—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Becket?"

"What?"

"Shut up and kiss me."

She did, for the second minute, and then Cirona had landed and was crossing the plateau with an armed escort. They met him outside, their narrow shadows reaching towards him across the grass.

"He's gone, Colonel." Becket spoke up before Cirona could ask. He directed his men to guard the *Cruiser*, which put them conveniently out of earshot.

"He's gone back to his ship," she continued, wanting to weep, "and the ship has gone back to wherever, and they're not ever coming back. Nothing you do to us will make any difference."

They told him the whole story, almost, while the daylight brightened around them. Cirona shuddered, gazed at the horizon for a long time, and then put his weapon away.

"At least he learned something about us."

"Maybe too much," said Becket, flushing a little. She rearranged her expression. "He learned that you Terran bullies would do anything to manipulate events in your own favor."

"Our own favor?" said the Colonel. "Is that what you think? Citizen Bluegreen, Earth is and always *will* be the dominant human society. The ambass—the alien, Botticelli, he should have come to Earth. Not to this bizarre little backwater and—"

"And us bizarre little nobodies?" said Lila. "I think we did better than you and your scheming—"

"I admit I underestimated your—"

"Later. We can talk about it later," said Becket. Had she said that before? She was very tired. "Look who's here."

It was the three Protection fighters. One landed some distance away while the other two circled, and Lieutenant Daltic climbed warily out.

"I gave my word that *Caruso* has no weapons," said Cirona, as they watched the soldiers fan out in a line and march towards them. "And I've explained that 'Major' Botticelli was a deranged criminal who hijacked your yacht."

They stared at him blankly. Daltic would be able to overhear them soon.

"I planned to 'arrest' him and get him safely off this wretched planet," Cirona explained, as if speaking to children. "Under the present circumstances, I believe he must have committed suicide by leaping from the cliff. Didn't he? By the way, I presume you've been careful with *Caruso*. I detest having my possessions in disarray."

"*Suicide?*" said Lila. "Pretend Tonio was just some crazy Terran? And let you get *away* with—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We're all getting away with a few things," said Cirona, turning to Becket. "Aren't we? On my return to the city I'm scheduled for an official hearing with the owners of the Aquacasino."

"They found out *already*?" Becket moaned.

Lila turned on her. "You said you didn't cheat."

"I didn't," she said miserably.

"Then you *did* steal those chips. Beck, you *promised* me—"

"I didn't steal them!" Becket ran a hand through her hair. Daltic was closing in. "I made them."

"You WHAT?!"

"Well, I didn't make them myself, I had them made at my cousin Ranni's factory, when I ran that booze over to The Space Bar & Grill in Newer York. How'd they find out so fast? I figured a day at least to balance their books and—"

"You *made* five thousand starts worth of chips, and passed them at the biggest casino in Noose, and won a personal vessel from a Terran officer with them?"

"I guess it was a little rash."

"Rash?" Lila crowed. "You glorious idiot, it was magnificent! We can laugh about it for years while we're in prison."

"Not necessarily." Cirona maintained his dignity, even while rushing his words. "If you corroborate my story, and agree to record all your observations of the alien—don't scowl at me, just record them for posterity, lock them up somewhere—I shall have one of my aides confess to the forgery, and send him back to Earth. They're both anxious enough to go home. We all are. And you *know* that no one would believe the truth."

"Well," said Becket, as Lila grudgingly nodded her agreement, "we've been in uglier fixes, telling stupider stories. Let's do it."

She raised her voice enough to reach Daltic. "Oh, thank you, Colonel! We were terrified, just terrified!"

Cirona gave her a dry look, and Lila muttered, "Tone it down, Beck."

"And here's Lieutenant *Daltic!*" Becket went on, warming up to the part. "Thank heavens we've been rescued! Thank the Lieutenant, Lila."

Cirona took it from there, with a weary glibness that made Becket wonder how often in his career he'd buried his mistakes beneath official explanations.

"You're very welcome, Citizens. I'm just grateful that, ah, Major Botticelli didn't harm you." He turned and saluted the Protection officers. "Sorry to get in the way of your rescue operation, Lieutenant, but I felt responsible for this dreadful incident. My government deeply regrets. . . ."

It worked, more or less, and everyone pretended to be civil until Cirona suggested that Becket and Lila ride back to the city with Daltic.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We'll just take the *Cruiser*," said Becket. But she knew what was coming.

"You're forgetting our agreement, Citizen." Cirona's cultivated voice held a warning. "No doubt your recent ordeal has clouded your memory."

Lieutenant Daltic frowned. "Some problem here? Whose yacht is it?"

Becket and Lila looked at each other, and then at the blue sky they wouldn't see much of after a forgery conviction.

"His."

"His."

So Cirona took the *Cruiser*, and the partners trailed along behind Daltic. As they walked, Becket laid her arm across Lila's trembling shoulders.

"Hey, kiddo," she whispered. "Don't cry."

"I'm not. I'm just imagining Cirona on board his perfectly pristine yacht."

"What do you mean?"

Lila smirked at her. "We never cleaned up after the food fight . . ."

"Or after dessert!" Becket laughed. "Don't forget that dessert!"

And they never did. ●

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Title of Publication: Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine. Publication No. 01622188.
2. Date of Filing: October 1, 1989. 3. Frequency of Issue: Every 28 Days; (A) No. of Issues Published Annually: 13; (B) Annual Subscription Price: $25.97.
4. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.
5. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers (not Printers): 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.
6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: President: Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Editor: Gardner Dozois, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Managing Editor: Sheila Williams, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.
7. Owner: Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Davis Communications, Inc., 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017; Joel Davis, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgages, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: NONE.
10. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Average No. Copies each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run) 125,817; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 12,176; (2) Mail Subscription: 70,669; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 82,845; (D) Free Distribution By Mail, Carrier or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 2,121; (E) Total Distibution (Sum of C and D): 84,966; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 4,704; (2) Return from News Agents: 36,147; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 125,817.

Actual Number Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing date: (A) Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run): 130,707; (B) Paid Circulation: (1) Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: 13,200; (2) Mail Subscription: 73,501; (C) Total Paid Circulation: 86,701; (D) Free Distribution by Mail, Carriers or Other Means Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies: 1,194; (E) Total Distribution (Sum of C and D): 87,895; (F) Copies Not Distributed: (1) Office Use, Left Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing: 6,137; (2) Return from News Agents: 36,675; (G) Total (Sum of E and F—should equal net press run shown in A): 130,707. I certify that the statements made by me are correct and complete.

ELIZABETH BEATTY
SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER

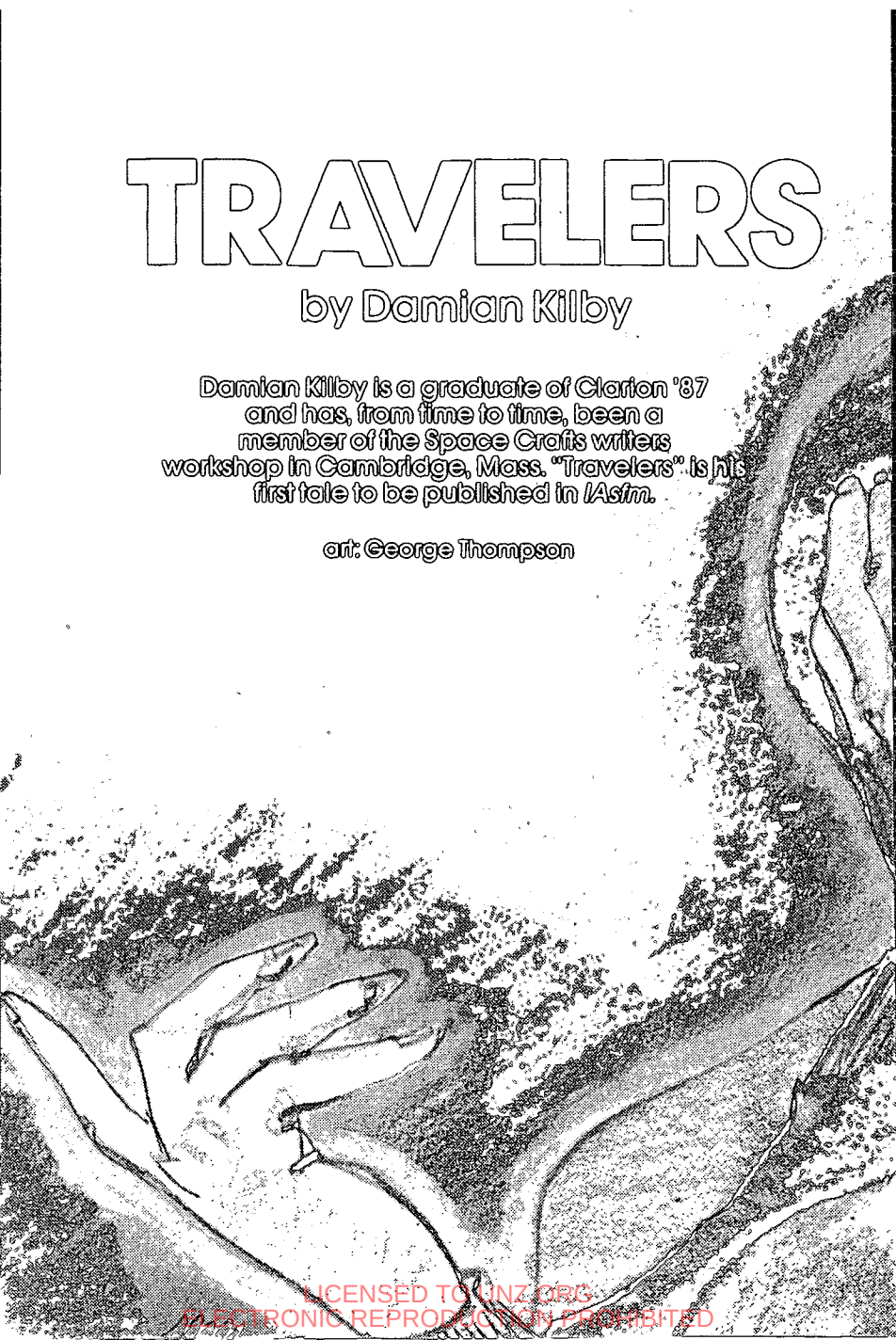
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TRAVELERS

by Damian Kilby

Damian Kilby is a graduate of Clarion '87 and has, from time to time, been a member of the Space Crafts writers workshop in Cambridge, Mass. "Travelers" is his first tale to be published in *IAsfm*.

art: George Thompson



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jessica met the time traveler in a shabby laundromat on Kirkland Street, not far from Harvard University.

This laundromat was lorded over by a broken-faced Pepsi-Cola clock. Here the scattered pages of abandoned newspapers looked like flaps of death-grey skin to Jessica's eye. The scuffed, tiled floor was one large smear of dirt. The front windows were painted over in sweaty condensation. An ancient "nickels only" detergent-vending machine swallowed five of Jessica's nickels without burping up a single packet of soap.

"Evil machine," Jessica said. She gave it a kick. Behind her an angry washer on spin-cycle shook and rattled with such violence it threatened to lift right off the floor and throw itself through the window. Two women sat on the bench by the window, calmly reading magazines, somehow ignoring everything going on around them.

Jessica gave the vending machine a second kick.

She barely noticed the guy who stepped over to see what she was doing. She growled, "This is the worst laundromat in the country. I always come back here. Why? Why?"

"This is my first time here," the guy said. His words were very clear, his voice cool, calm. His eyes were dark, hair short, features even—handsome or bland, Jessica couldn't decide so soon. He held up a jug of liquid detergent. "You can use some of mine. There's plenty."

They sat atop sloshing, moaning washing machines and introduced themselves. His name was Sean. He'd come to Cambridge to translate texts, using the libraries at MIT and Harvard.

Then Sean's laundry was dry. He said, "Can I ask you out on a date now?"

"You can ask if you want. . . ."

Naomi, Jessica's apartment mate, prepared a pot of mint tea while Jessica told all about her encounter at the laundromat.

"I don't think it's very smart: going out with a guy who tries to pick you up at a laundromat," Naomi said. The two of them shuttled over from the minute kitchen to the tiny living room, resting mugs of tea on the arms of the well worn couch.

"He didn't just try. He did pick me up."

"I hope you didn't tell him where we live."

"Not even our phone number." Jessica gulped down her tea.

"Keep your eyes open for anything strange about this Sean guy," Naomi added, "because you never can tell. You've got to protect yourself. Not just physically. Underneath, you're pretty sensitive."

Jessica imagined she could read Naomi's thoughts. She knew her roommate too well. Naomi didn't like the way Jessica attracted men, and she was sure it wasn't looks because Jessica had a fat butt and her hair was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such a mess. She sometimes said that Jessica projected an aura of mysteriousness. Her main consolation was that Jessica's relationships never lasted long. Naomi, herself, was patient, waiting for just the right man.

Naomi said, "Anyway, tell me what this Sean guy looks like."

The arrangement was for Sean to rendezvous with Jessica at the Harvard Square record store where she worked checking people's bags and attaching sales stickers to rows of compact discs. Customers, Jessica observed, came and filled the store in flocks of particular types. She practiced recognizing the different breeds. Flocks of heavy metal fans. Flocks of New Age music lovers. She pegged Sean as belonging to the jazz variety—or possibly folk—but, when she told him she wasn't ready to go yet, he went browsing among the twelve-inch disco singles.

Jessica suggested Mexican, but Sean had his heart set on a certain hamburger place. He brought her to a bar and grill designed to look like a fifties diner, with mirrors covering the walls and a miniature jukebox in each red vinyl booth. They both ordered the cheeseburger platter special and a Bud.

Sean did have a strange side to him. Jessica noted the way he carefully examined each new bit of food, a pickle or a french fry, before taking a first, cautious bite. As he chewed and swallowed, weird little expressions passed across his face almost too fast to be seen.

But how critical could Jessica be of him? She certainly wasn't on her best behavior. Before the food came, she stared at herself in the mirrored wall for at least five minutes straight. And later she let out an abrupt yelp when she took a look at the selections on the juke box. Everyone at the bar turned to give her the look.

"Barry Manilow is evil. 'New York, New York' is evil and so is this one by the Doors," Jessica muttered. She flipped through all the selections and identified every single evil song for Sean. He didn't seem to mind at all.

He listened attentively as she reviewed a cross section of jobs she'd quit. Three years out of college and she really hadn't decided on a career yet. "The whole concept of having a boss is a fraud."

Sean said, "I can imagine."

"Naomi likes to say that there's always grad school," Jessica added. "Right now she's a receptionist at a software company. She gets plenty of time to work on her poems during the slow hours."

After a second beer, they took a little walk along the Charles River, stepping off the path every few minutes for the joggers rushing past. Jessica let slip vague details of a past romance (it could have been one of several). A great heartbreak, of course.

She experienced some suspense, waiting for Sean to kiss her. She

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

couldn't decide if she wanted him to or not. But he never made any such attempt.

Over the following week, Jessica and Sean went out a lot. Each time to a different kind of restaurant—Sean insisted on that. They went to a Thai place, ate Indian and Ethiopian. Sean would often order three or four dishes to get a taste of each. He always paid the whole bill.

"Money means nothing at all, to me," he told her with a sly, secret-keeping smile. The waiters, waitresses, and waitpersons always gave them excellent service, as if they could sniff out the huge tip that was coming.

Jessica learned that when there was something Sean wanted to do or see there was no stopping him. A memorable instance was the night he found out John Lee Hooker was playing at Nightstage.

When they got to the club they discovered that the show had been sold out a week in advance. "I've got to see John Lee Hooker," Sean said. "This is my only chance." He stepped up to the heavy-browed bouncer, laid a hand on the man's shoulder and got him to step over to the corner for a brief talk. Jessica didn't see any money change hands, but somehow Sean must have bribed the guy, because after half a minute the bouncer waved the two of them through the door without even charging admission.

The club was packed. They had to slide sideways between people to get away from the entrance. Jessica caught some of Sean's excitement just from holding his hand. When the band came on, she found herself bopping up and down with the rest of the crowd, even though she didn't know any of the songs. She only got occasional glimpses of John Lee Hooker's shiny black face, haloed by the broad brim of his hat, above the heads of all those people in front of her. Most of the time all she saw was the hat.

At one point, Sean's hand slipped away from hers and she lost him in the press of people. Suddenly she remembered how much she hated crowds. The men and woman around her looked lifeless—bloodless, reflecting the stage lights. The music sounded shrill and depressing. After two songs, though, Sean was back at her side, holding her hand again. Now the jagged edge of the music seemed to triumph, cutting through its own sadness.

Afterward, Sean explained that he'd pushed his way to the front because, "I had to get a close-up look into the face of a great bluesman."

One morning, after finishing breakfast, Jessica felt compelled to get back in bed. She pulled all the shades down and got under the covers without taking her clothes off. She wasn't sleepy. Her eyes were wide

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

open. A few times a voice inside said *I could kill myself if I wanted.* It was just a thought. Thoughts of all kinds rushed by, a great river of them, going faster and faster.

At the end of the day, all the thoughts passed. She couldn't really remember any of them individually. Just one big flow, time gone by, the day wasted. That made her angry and anger made her get up. She started to make a sandwich for her dinner, while wondering if she had come to any profound conclusions during the day. Maybe she had had some important ideas which were now lost. She punched a wall, managing to hurt her hand. She shook her bruised fingers, shouted a threat at the toaster, then popped out the toast and threw it against the wall.

The next day, Jessica managed to get dressed and get out of the house. She headed down the usual route to work, but she went right past the corner where she should have turned, and she kept on straight ahead. At the Star Market, she used a pay phone to call in sick.

"What's wrong with you?" the assistant manager's voice asked at the other end of the line.

"Argh!" Jessica yelled. She hung up.

It was amazing she kept jobs for as long as she did. People seemed reluctant to fire her.

She walked along the border area of Cambridge and Somerville, past grocery stores, car washes, warehouses, and construction sites. Along the commercial strips, she pressed on through the pedestrian traffic. Each person wore a uniform to identify him or herself as a type. Business suit in a hurry. Lady in fake furs and fingernails. Broad shoulders in plaid shirt, jeans bunched at work boots. She'd seen them all over and over again for years now. None of them saw *her:* she walked with her feet hitting the pavement, but they all floated by like meat caught on invisible hooks.

She was unhappy all the time, she decided. Really, it was a funny thing. She laughed out loud, a kind of nasal chuckle, and then noticed a young man—wool sweater and wire-frame glasses type—flashing her a slightly hopeful smile as he passed. She hurried on, thoughts turning to Sean.

He had finally kissed her on their fifth date. A pretty good kiss that left her interested, that seemed to say more was coming; get ready for the game to continue. Maybe she wasn't unhappy absolutely *all* the time. She felt okay with him, but she did see that they were playing the game of courtships and love affairs. A game that tries to match an ideal pattern, tries to prove that the world is simple and pure after all. The partners sometimes seemed interchangeable. Fun, okay, but just a passing thing that could never stick too deep into Jessica.

She'd been walking for hours and a hollow exhausted feeling filled her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body. She stopped and leaned against a convenient cinder-block wall. It was the back of a supermarket. Through vents above her head, she could hear the rumbling of the store's freezers. They sounded like they were working hard. Great engines blowing out air. They seemed to be murmuring to her in conspiratorial voices, trying to pass on important messages.

She was angry: how could it be that in a whole day of wandering it was the voices of machines that sounded the most meaningful?

Jessica brought Sean along for one of the same-old-parties, held, this time, in a box-shaped old Somerville house. She'd decided to let her regular circle meet her new boyfriend.

The core group of the same-old-gang went back to earliest college days, and most had trickled into the Boston area since graduation. "We weren't frat types; we needed someone to hang out with on the weekends," Jessica told Sean. She took him around the apartment for introductions. Here was an architect, this one was an anthropology grad student, here a halfway-house counselor. Here, also, was a file clerk, a waitress, a guy calling himself a punch-press operator. Jessica noted, "Some of us are more directed than others."

Then she spotted Carl Beck leaning against the wall beside the stereo, his arms folded across his chest. "Oh. Shit. Who invited *him?*"

She immediately steered Sean in a different direction, toward Naomi. Carl Beck was a Tufts law student who'd gone out with Jessica a few months back.

"Doesn't he know when he's not wanted around?" she said.

Naomi was busy pouring Sean a coffee mug full of wine and starting in on him with her poetry talk: "All the great poets were very neurotic. . . ."

Out of habit or tradition these parties always took on the same shape. Soon all the lights but one were flicked off. Everyone sat on the floor, jugs of wine at the center. There was the same exact food—ruffled chips, sour cream onion dip, garlic bread—as at the very first such gathering. They drank out of coffee mugs, listened to Joan Armatrading records (no CDs), gossiped about friends, discussed Peru or Soweto.

"Sean's not bad," Naomi whispered. She raised an eyebrow. "Does he have a friend for me?"

"You've been drinking," Jessica told her. "You sound like something in a TV sitcom."

"So?" Naomi pushed a jug of white wine toward Jessica.

Jessica picked up a warm can of beer instead and began rolling it between her hands. She looked up at Carl Beck, over by the stereo, changing a record. Once, his big-boned face had seemed handsome. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

caught her staring and gave her a grin. The same grin he always flashed, the salesman's smile that said you had to pretend to like him. The needle went down onto a new record. It was the Rolling Stones' *Some Girls*.

"You can't play that!" Jessica said, jumping up.

She hurried across the room and reached for the turntable.

Carl blocked her with his arm. "Come on, already. This is a great album."

Jessica growled.

"The Stones," Naomi put in, "are very sexist. Have you listened to their lyrics?"

"Mick Jagger is evil!" Jessica declared.

"Here we go." Carl gave her a laugh along with the grin. "Act like this if you want, Jessie, but you can't always have things your way."

So Carl Beck was the one who got his way. They all listened to a side of the Stones album. The party conversations picked up where they had left off. A couple of people listened to Jessica while she tried to explain how just thinking about Mick Jagger made her feel ill.

The same-old-gang was used to Jessica's off-key behavior. They were familiar with such things as her bursts of manic cackling during the most somber parts of old French films, or her wailing, in public, about a coat of evil plastic covering America. She was a fixture, an expected piece of strangeness.

The record finished. Jessica rushed to the stereo and slipped on some Cat Stevens before Carl could even blink.

She eased back against a couch and tried to relax. To one side of her, people were fantasizing about "bulding a whole community of our own" in Vermont. On the other side, it was talk of broken marriage engagements.

Concentrate on the music. She heard the record playing, but what should have been music came to her as artificial noise. She tried to focus in on Sean, but Naomi was still latched onto him, chanting out her thoughts on poetic inspiration. Hanging out this way used to seem comforting, but now she found herself in a shadow room surrounded by shadow friends.

Jessica remembered when Carl Beck said, "Maybe I'm falling for you." There was a week in there when they spent all their time together. But as soon as it was over he started revealing all kinds of personal things about her, making her sound crazy.

Their final morning together had been over breakfast in his kitchen, when she started shouting about the unfairness of her second grade teacher. Carl's housemates could be heard laughing at her from the next room over. Following that, Jessica didn't show up for their next two dates. She just sat in her room, thinking and not thinking, waiting and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wondering if he would call. He never did. Now, when she saw him around, she got a smug grin from him which said to her, *I know you're nuts.*

The terrible thing was thinking she *was* going nuts, alone and lost here in the middle of all her old friends. Everyone was busy talking, but she didn't hear the words. All their little gestures and poses were frozen in black light, each movement the same over and over again. They probably all thought she *was* crazy. Maybe they *knew* she was crazy.

Jessica stuck her fingers deep into the onion dip and swirled them around in there, imagining she was scrawling messages deep in the gooey paste. Panic expanded inside her and she knew it would have to come out. She didn't know what she was going to do next until she actually began doing it: she smeared dip across her brow, carelessly plastered her cheeks and jaw with the cold sludge. Then, for a big finish, she shook her beer can as hard as she could before popping the snap top open.

"Eyiee!" she shrieked as beer splattered everywhere, a jet of foam rebounding off the ceiling. Everyone stopped talking. Confused looks on their faces.

Carl Beck was the first to react: "Jee-*sus*, there she goes *again*."

"Again, again," Jessica moaned.

She got up, ran out of the room and down a hallway into the empty kitchen. In a moment, she heard conversational noises begin again. One voice said, "How about something danceable?" Music started up.

Jessica went to the sink to wash her face. Her attention was drawn by plastic bottles sitting on a shelf over the sink. She gave each bottle a shake, listening to the pills bounce around inside. Vitamin C, buffered aspirin, tetracycline. Nothing she could kill herself with. She wondered if she'd get spectacularly sick if she swallowed all of them.

Sean walked into the room. She went back to splashing water over her slime-molded face. He sat at the kitchen table, but kept silent.

Drying her face with a dish towel, Jessica said, "Did you realize how psycho I am?"

"No. You're not psycho."

"Sure. Ask anyone: Jessica is nuts. So don't play games with me."

"I know you're sane. It's this world that makes you very unhappy. I understand these things." Sean paused, as if taking time for a deep thought. "You see, I come from a long time away. You'd call me a time traveler." He kept a straight face.

There was no way Jessica could keep from laughing at him.

Sean's studio apartment was four stories above Mass. Ave. The sounds of traffic were far away. The studio was long and large, sparsely furnished, with a bed pushed into one corner and a low-slung couch on the far side. The walls and high ceiling were coated in clean white paint.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jessica felt comfortable as soon as she walked in. When Sean locked the door, he sealed out the rest of the world. The two of them groped and kissed like overheated teenagers.

Sean pulled down the white shades and then snapped out the lights. In the dark, their kissing felt more adult-like. They took off their clothes and got into bed without a word.

Jessica liked making love in the dark, feeling skin against skin, squirming leisurely, listening to the draw of his breath and the little explosions of his grunts. It felt real. If only they could go on this way indefinitely. The word *love* teased her just before orgasm rode up through her. She glued her lips to his mouth and the climax echoed down into her toes.

Her mind eased into motionless bliss, arms and legs locked around Sean, feeling him gradually shrink and slip out of her. In the dark, he didn't really have a name. He was just male. He didn't have any faults or peculiarities. Just warm skin and the perfect weight of a body against her. In the dark, it didn't feel like they were playing the game of love.

Sunday afternoon, Sean dragged Jessica out to a basement cafe which was crammed full of artsy grad student types, sucking on cigarettes, all trying to look European. Jessica brooded over a cup of expensive Arabic coffee, imagining ways that her body might kill itself without her brain being conscious of what was happening.

". . . a completely different era in human history," Sean was saying. "Are you listening to me?" He reached across the table for her hand. "I'm telling you, I really *am* a time traveler."

"You mean you're at least as nuts as me?" She poured a stream of sugar into her coffee. "Don't worry, I still like you."

He was stubborn about this thing. "My point is, that a few hundred years—maybe it's a thousand—from now, mankind will gain real understanding and mastery over the human mind. By my time, almost fifteen-hundred years away, we understand each other and take it for granted. We've got ourselves and our world in balance."

"It must be nice—not realizing that you're crazy," Jessica said. She immediately felt sorry for that crack, but his superiority complex was getting on her nerves. They sat in silence, picking at the bowl of tabouli between them.

The waitress came by and dropped their check on the table. Sean whispered, "See our waitress? She's tired and hates everybody. Actually, she hates the walls, the floors, the tables, this whole building."

Jessica looked at the waitress' pale cheeks, then her dangling earrings, the hoops of bracelets around her wrists.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You mean you can read minds," Jessica asked, interested despite her blah mood.

"No. I can just *see* things. I look into people's eyes, I watch their movements. I can see much more about people than you'd think is possible."

She paused to think for a second. "You could also just make it all up."

"Remember when we first kissed? You wanted me to do it," Sean said. "But for a long time, I could see that while you wanted to be kissed, you also *didn't* want it at the same time. You weren't sure." Sean looked down at the table with a touch of shyness. "When you were clear on what you wanted . . . I gave you a kiss."

Jessica frowned. "But . . ."

Over Sean's shoulder, she saw Carl Beck standing at the door. "Oh god. We've got to leave. Carl Beck has just spotted me and he's headed this way." She tried to keep her eyes glued to the ceiling as Carl began to weave his way between the tightly-packed tables.

Sean threw a ten dollar bill on the table. "The unhappy waitress needs a big tip." He threw a five down next to the ten. They were pulling on their coats as Carl zeroed in.

"You're not leaving *now*," he said, "are you? The fun could be just beginning."

"Oh god." Jessica spun around, hoping to find some kind of rear door.

"Hey, I'm glad to see *you*, too," Carl responded. He stood squarely in their path, his salesman grin rising.

Sean moved in front of him, touched his shoulder and then waved a hand in his face. "Carl, step back, please," Sean said, "and let us pass."

Carl moved out of the way, blinking rapidly, his smirk stuck in place, looking stupid. Jessica hurried past him, eager to get to the exit.

"And Carl," Sean said, over his shoulder, "be nice to the waitress."

Playing the game of tourists from the far future, they spent the good part of an afternoon wandering through a giant discount department store. Jessica was falling into the habit of humoring Sean's time-travel fantasy.

She did her best to explain personal stereos and exercycles with digital readouts. Sean tried out a blow dryer and several vacuum cleaners. He charmed a salesman into demonstrating thirty-five different pairs of stereo speakers. He made faces into the video cameras on display and watched people stare up at the ranks of TV's all playing the same soap opera.

The cashiers' lines fascinated him. He stood off to the side and studied the customers as they shuffled forward and made their purchases. Jessica tried to examine them as intently as Sean did. What would a real time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traveler see here? From a distance, the customers looked like mannequin-sized puppets, and she imagined that all human movement was the following of invisible lines—lines criss-crossing every section of the city, from office buildings to private bathrooms.

"They give off little sparks when they hand over their money," Sean said.

Jessica muttered, "I'm never going to buy anything, ever again."

They drifted into the personal computer section. Sean sat down at one of the model work stations and poked at the keyboard with one finger. A video game monster gobbled its way up and down the screen, green light reflecting on Sean's face.

"If you were from the future, you'd know all about computers," Jessica commented.

"I don't know one thing about these machines," Sean replied. He slid over to the next computer and managed to type in his name. "In my era, the machines take care of themselves. They're mostly underground, out of sight. Sometimes we do speak with them, if we need help on a scientific project, on building something. They take care of all kinds of work that keeps human beings busy here."

"Your future sounds too perfect. Everything's taken care of—what would you do with all the spare time?"

"Well," Sean said, "*I* like to travel."

Jessica switched to part-time hours at the record store.

"Don't worry about money," Sean said. He wanted her to spend all her time with him. "I'm going to have to return to my own time sooner or later."

He paid for all her meals and began buying her expensive clothing. Men from the future certainly were well set for cash. On occasion, she caught herself taking the time traveler bit seriously. But what his stories really implied was that the relationship wasn't permanent.

One day, watching Sean buy himself a leather jacket, she noticed he didn't pay with cash, credit card, or *anything*. The cashier rang up the sale and just handed the receipt over to him. Sean put on the jacket and pocketed the receipt.

"How'd you do that?" Jessica asked. "You hypnotized that guy!"

"Not exactly. But I did make him believe I have credit with the store."

What else could it be but hypnotism? But Sean insisted it was something much more effective. A subtle, elegant, invisible touch. It was easy for him. "Here, I find myself in a world of millions of blind people—all banging around, crashing into each other. In theory, I can take anything I want."

"That jacket is evil," Jessica said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It is? I thought it was cool."

Sean dragged her into the nearest bank to show her his powers. Jessica stood right beside him as he spoke a few words to the teller. No account, no card, he just asked for five hundred dollars. The teller counted it out in brand new twenty and fifty-dollar bills and slid the money under the window.

Out on the street, Jessica told him, "Basically, this is stealing. Somewhere down the line, that was someone else's money you took."

"Money has no meaning."

She tried to explain economics to him. There was supply, demand, opportunity cost, economic rent. The significance of money was in there somewhere. She kept throwing out theories.

A beggar with a dust-mop beard interrupted her speech, mumbling about spare change while holding out a hand, his gaze fixed down upon his shoes. Sean handed a bill to the man. When the bum unfolded it and discovered a twenty, he looked up at them, bubbling with enthusiasm. "Thank you. God bless you! Thank you, sir!" Sean shrugged and handed the man another bill.

"Money is silly stuff. It's certainly mixed up in everyone's confused emotions—the sooner you get rid of it the better," he told Jessica. "I can't take it seriously. It's impossible for me to believe in it."

Jessica worried about the inside of her head. Nights, she suffered from very shallow sleep. She'd wake every hour or so, sweaty and shaken, as if rising out of a nightmare; but the dreams she remembered were mundane bits of fluff about making a phone call or meeting a friend at the supermarket. She formed the idea that she was entering dreams without truly falling into sleep, that her feeling of horror rose out of the inability of her waking mind to merge with her dream-self. There was no explaining this upsetting separation of her selves to anyone. Naomi recommended sleeping pills and the assistant manager at work advised hot rum at bedtime.

Sleep was more peaceful when she stayed over at Sean's apartment. The game of love did have its uses. It created its own little world of two and distracted a person away from her normal lines of thought.

"You realize, it's not too smart to sleep with him all the time." Naomi was full of advice when Jessica came home to stuff her shoulder bag full of socks and underwear. "Do you know what it's all leading to? What does he want in the long run?"

"At least all that sex is good exercise." It was too easy to get Naomi to frown. "I've got you to do my worrying *for* me. I can't plan out my future. Who even knows what love is?"

Even at Sean's place, Jessica often drifted up from sleep for no apparent

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reason. Sometimes she sat up and took a good look at Sean. His face looked soft and blank in the pre-dawn glow. Though they fell asleep curled up together, he always wound up by himself, at the edge of the bed. He lay flat on his back without a pillow, hands folded on his chest. Was he dreaming about that future world he liked to talk about so much? Maybe at night he went back there, leaving his body a dreamless shell. But if she pushed up against him, he turned in his sleep and put an arm around her, which made being awake seem not so bad.

On a rainy Sunday, grey sky pressing down hard against the earth, the streets were mostly empty. Sean approached a lone man hurrying down the street and drew the fellow over to join Jessica under the awning of a shoe store. Sean was obsessed with proving he really was a time traveler. He held his hands against both sides of the man's head and pushed his face close, locking eyes with this stranger. Jessica watched uneasily, fearing the police would pull up and arrest them for invasion of the human mind.

"My name is Kevin." The man spoke out loud, without being asked any questions. "I'm headed home—spent the night at Jenny's."

Kevin gushed out a stream of jumbled confessions. Sleeping with Jenny . . . really gay . . . was really in love with his boss who was straight . . . the boss fixed him up with Jenny. Kevin felt he was an actor . . . he was three or four people. He drank too much. Sex bothered him. Being alone in his apartment made him feel . . .

Jessica had to let Kevin's monologue blur into a flow of emotional warbling. The sight of Sean locked together with a strange man made her uncomfortable enough. He had told her that he could see shadows of thoughts cross people's faces and could look into the eyes and follow in "lines of energies." They were both motionless but she could sense the tension running between their bodies. The stillness seemed to crackle with intensity. It made her so fidgety that she had to say something: "Gay men are okay, but they never made sense to me."

"That's no surprise," Sean answered, without turning his head. "*No* one in this world understands anyone else."

Slowly, Kevin's outpouring faded. "Have a good day," he said when Sean let go. He pulled his raincoat close to his body and returned to his original route, marching on through the drizzle.

"He won't remember this. I did some realigning," Sean said. "Kevin will find he feels a little more in control. But probably not for long."

If Jessica allowed herself to stop and *believe* Sean, she'd have to worry that either he'd been realigning her energies or she was really in love. But she felt a welling of depression that made her hardly able to think about any of these things. She hardly heard Sean lecturing about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

energies that pushed and jabbed between people all across the world, creating an inescapable "field of existence." He said things about layers of civilization, about working toward sight and harmony—all that embarrassing, idealistic stuff he tended to babble.

"Time travelers are too weird." She spoke directly to the store window, as if the display of high-top sneakers could understand her better than any person.

Times with Sean, Jessica began to feel herself shifting in and out between two different realities. In one universe, Sean was simply a lunatic. Then she'd slip into the other, where he really *was* a traveler across thousands of years. All the physical details of the world were the same, but the essence of everything was changed. Jessica even felt herself lit in a different light.

"You are one of the most sensitive," Sean told her. "You feel the rawness of the pressures all around you and you try to pull back. Other people are much less aware, and their actions are buried deep in confusion. It's like people who don't know their atmosphere is polluted. They cough all the time, but have no idea why."

And just as easily, Jessica would find herself flipping back into the other universe, where it was obvious that Sean held the corniest, flakiest of delusions. Back to choking on the fear that *she* would go completely insane. Into a grainy universe that had no future, except more of the same.

Sean entered into a junk food phase. One day he was completely into sour cream potato chips. For two days he ate nothing but chocolate donuts. He'd started buying a lot of things and his apartment was getting cluttered. There were unopened boxes containing CD players and lap top computers in the center of the room. The pieces of ten model airplanes were jumbled together on the couch. An eight hundred dollar suit hung in the bathroom. Sean was getting a little frenzied with all the buying.

When indoors, they stayed on the bed, their private island amid all the consumer goods.

"Why do you want to spend so much time in the past," Jessica asked, "considering that you say life is so perfected in your future?"

"Life is never perfect. It only looks that way from a distance. The way *your* life would look to someone from a very poor country." Sean stuffed a handful of caramel popcorn into his mouth. "The food is a lot better here. And I really like *you*."

Jessica looked close into Sean's face, trying to see everything, hoping to see what was in there. He was always *looking* at people, and claiming to see whole individuals. When she looked at them, she usually saw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plastic masks and a parade of costumes. She made herself soak in every detail. The pores on his nose, a speck of popcorn caught in the corner of his mouth, a blue vein under the skin at his temple. She had to get everything down in her memory. Just in case he did disappear into a fold of time.

"Sean, can you take me *back* with you?" Jessica asked. "Take me, when you go?"

"I can't." Sean slapped his chest. "This isn't even my body."

Time travel was the projection of consciousness, he tried to explain. Sean's mind had been loosed from his body and swung back through time to this body. The host was a completely blank-minded coma victim. "To his doctors, it was a medical miracle." Adequate host bodies were rare, non-existent in many eras. "Sometimes it seems I can feel a little tug at my mind, calling me back. But I want to stay with you."

"That's what I want." Jessica squeezed up close to him. "But this isn't your body?" She moved away again to the far side of the bed. "I'm going to have to think about this one for a while."

Jessica brought Sean to a place rumored to have great popcorn. It was a cozy little tavern with a brick fireplace, raw wood paneling and a moose head over the bar.

Sean discovered that he liked daiquiris, and he decided that a bar was a good place to be. He started asking the other patrons their names and it wasn't too long before he was buying a round of drinks. He introduced various people to each other, coaxing them to talk about themselves.

He seemed to be purposefully altering the mood in the tavern. Everyone was smiling and laughing, their faces flushed with good cheer. And the happier the atmosphere became the more Sean filled with exuberant energy, bouncing up from his seat and slapping shoulders. He was getting bolder, too, weaving his way between tables as if he was weaving everyone together into a single community. For Jessica, it was as if the whole bar was in sync with the happiness she'd been enjoying with Sean.

She picked out some acceptable songs from the jukebox and Sean fixed up couples from among the singles. Soon he had everyone up and dancing. They whirled about him in circles and he waved his arms as if he was directing all their motions. It wasn't hard to see that Sean was an angel with glorious powers.

They left the bar and headed toward Jessica's apartment to pick up some clothing, stopping at every corner to embrace. She drank in Sean's kisses.

They discovered Carl Beck standing on the sidewalk near her house,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poised in the shadows as if he had been waiting for them. Jessica tried to walk straight past him, but Carl lurched right out in front of her.

"What d'you *know?*" Carl said.

Jessica jerked back from him. "Are you following me?"

"Why would I want to do that?" Carl's shadow grin said: you're talking crazy again. "I think I'm allowed to get out for a walk, now and then."

"Well, you can go now," she told him. All the muscles in her body clenched into little fists. She had to resist the urge to scream and even Sean's arm rubbing against her back couldn't relax her. "You're spoiling my whole mood."

Carl kicked at a garbage can lid propped against the curb. He insisted on pushing closer to her. "I'm tired of your attitude."

Sean stepped in between them. "Carl, you are ruining what was a perfect evening," he said, his voice reflecting all the tension that Jessica felt.

"Aw, I feel so *sorry* about that."

Carl tried to push Sean aside. Instead Sean managed to reach inside of his lunge and poke a finger against Carl's chest. At that touch Carl froze in place, even his lips caught in mid-snarl.

Sean laughed. He moved in close, to stare into Carl's eyes.

"Now this one will do anything we tell him to," Sean explained, holding a hand up in victory.

"He's such an ass," Jessica said.

Sean circled Carl, looking him over, as if considering all the possibilities. "He does need a lesson. Carl, why don't you sing for us?"

On command, Carl Beck squawked out part of the Talking Heads' "Life During Wartime." Jessica snickered at the spastic distortions crossing his mostly frozen face and the stiff poses he struck.

"Why doesn't he dance?"

Sean had him attempt a tap dance, slapping his sneakers against the pavement, shuffling in and out of shadows. Then Jessica suggested ballet, so Carl leaped and pranced down the length of the block. He was the complete puppet. Jessica could almost see the strings pulling at his legs and arms, and she could do some of the pulling when she wanted. This was the proper fate for a guy who thought he could jerk people around whenever he pleased.

A few passers-by had gathered across the street to watch Carl's antics. He flailed through cartwheels and jumping jacks and then did a hula dance while quacking like a duck. His audience clapped for more after each stunt. Sean bowed to them and, like a ringmaster, directed Carl on to the next absurdity.

Jessica caught sight of Sean's face full on in the glow of a street light. She'd never see him this way: jaw muscles tensed with anger, straining

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grin, eyes wide like a maniac—as if filled with excitement and pain at the same time.

He was directing Carl through a series of somersaults when Jessica touched Sean's shoulder and said, "Are you sure you're all right?"

Sean turned to her and let Carl flop onto his back with a painful-sounding thud. He stood for a long while, staring down at Carl, whose frozen expression just barely hinted at an undertow of terror.

"What am I doing . . . ?" Sean's voice was very small now. He covered his face with his hands. "I'm out of control."

He helped Carl up from the sidewalk and then cupped his hands around Carl's face, locking eyes with him. A shiver passed from one to the other, but otherwise they were motionless.

Jessica didn't like seeing this intimate union. Not with Carl—she could only muster so much sympathy for him.

"There can't be much to see inside of Carl Beck," she couldn't resist telling Sean.

"He's just as complicated and unhappy as you are, though most of the time he doesn't know it," Sean answered quietly. "He thinks about you a lot."

"Don't be silly."

"I'm going to make him forget this entire meeting—more of my tampering, but . . ." Sean fell silent. In another minute he let go of Carl.

Sean said, "I've stayed too long. I don't see my own actions clearly anymore."

Sean mumbled stuff about losing a grip on all his choices. He was deflated. All the energy Jessica had come to expect from him was gone. She had to drag him through the streets, back to his apartment. When they got there she did her best to get his mind off the whole Carl Beck scene with kisses and roaming hands. She played the seductress and led him over to the bed.

Sex wasn't at all the same this time. Jessica sat astride Sean, holding herself up, hands pressed down against his shoulders. The world was just shadows melting away around them; she was riding her time traveler into multiple futures. She looked down at him and imagined the energies of his personality crackling down the twin wells of his eyes: his energy animating this shell of a host body.

In fact, it was the body which was doing all the responding. Sean's expression was still lost and defeated. Jessica felt herself shifting in and out of the universe where he was the time traveler, opposing shades of reality flickering through her body. Was this the puppet master beneath her? He could take anything he wanted. Could have sex in a stolen body.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anger against him rose up in her with a force of its own, rasping hot in her lungs. She began to grind herself down hard against him.

When she finished the act, she expected to be washed over by a sense of peacefulness, but the tide of anger was still there inside—a part of her that kept expanding. And there he lay, like a dead puppy dog, the sheets twisted around his legs. Her anger demanded she continue following grim lines of thought:

"How do I *know?*" Jessica said. She paused, waiting for Sean to turn his gaze up. "How do I know that you haven't been playing with my mind? You could do it to *me* as easily as you did to Carl Beck—and to lots of other people!"

"Not to you," Sean answered in a cool whisper. "I would never do that. You're the one I love."

"*But.* I would never know if you *did* mess up my thoughts. Everything I feel could be an illusion. You control the game completely." The rage was the thing itself, in full glory. She felt the burn of emotions that had to be let out, the scene played through. Weak protests only stoked her up higher. She told him, "How could I ever trust you!"

"Anything you've felt has come from *yourself.* All of it was real," he claimed. "I don't know what to do now, I'm becoming twisted up inside. I've stayed here all this time to be with you. I wanted to stay for good."

"Sure. I've been going around as if I was living in this beautiful dream—believing all your perfect life crap. It's embarrassingly stupid."

She jumped up from bed and started pulling on her clothes, rolling out strings of harsh words all the while. Rage had control. Part of her enjoyed the blaze inside of her and refused to let her feel sorry for him. "All I ever get from you is lies." She stomped a box of pretzels on her way to the door. "It hurts me to think how I'll never know what was real between us. If anything was." She opened the door and glared at him, still lying on his stomach. "I don't ever want to see you again."

"Please don't go," Sean said. He just barely pulled himself up to a sitting position. "Not now."

"Don't try to stop me!"

And she was out the door, down the stairs, onto the street. Rage flared triumphant in her chest. The late night buildings were dusty ghosts. The sky sagged: an empty black sheet. A dog barking from behind a fence sounded as if it was underwater.

Jessica quit her job and sat around the apartment drinking up Naomi's supply of ginseng tea. The rage had shrunk down to a hard little rock sitting heavy in her gut. She waited for Sean to call her. Once, she thought of calling him. But that wouldn't give her the proof she needed. She practiced being cool and still.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Actually, I did think that Sean was nicer than most," Naomi commented. "But it comes as no surprise. He wasn't *that* far above average."

"He hasn't called me." She knew Naomi was thinking that none of her past men had called her back either.

Three days of sitting at home was enough; Jessica gave up on the telephone. She got out of the house and hit the sidewalks, taking a bridge across the Charles River and traveling on through the geometries of the city, seeking the proper state of mind amid the fumes of heavy traffic and the buildings leaning ominously over the streets. She tried to hold thoughts of Sean at a distance, keep him an abstraction. The first thing was to clear herself of any belief in his wild stories. All men were imperfect, she knew that, but their imperfections were never the ones she was prepared for. What was there that she could do about it? She was left marching on, along the same old groove.

Following a sudden urge, she stopped at a bookstore to browse through the mystery section—diverging from her usual pattern. Being still instead of walking made her grow interested in the people crowding through the store. She looked at women's clothing, noticed the dust on a man's glasses. Then paid closer attention to other kinds of details: a lady thumbing through calendars, looking bored; a young woman and man who kept rubbing shoulders together while they recounted the plots of their favorite novels to each other. Jessica wondered if she grabbed one of them and looked deep into his or her eyes, would she be able to see where their love was headed?

In the end, she decided to go back to him, the first time she'd done that for any man.

She knocked at the door to his apartment and heard him walk slowly to the door and then pause there. When he opened up, she gave him a big hug.

"What's this?" He pulled back from her.

"Sean, I guess I love you."

He stared at her. "I'm not Sean," Sean said, taking a step back. "You've made a mistake."

"Come on, no games," Jessica said. She moved closer and grabbed him by the shoulders. "If you're not Sean—then who could you be?"

"My name is Jonathan."

She peered closely at his face. Trying to look deep into him. To her surprise, she found that she could tell that there was something very different beneath his features.

"Oh damn! Sean is *gone*." She pulled back, a little dizzy. A whole universe was falling into place around her. "I *missed* him. And *you*: you're another one. A time traveler."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You aren't making any sense," the man-who-wasn't-Sean said.

But he knew what she was talking about. He looked her deep in the eyes, transfixing her. Her thoughts were beginning to unravel, everything seemed to shimmer except for the black holes of his pupils. She felt a heat inside her head. "There's no such thing as time travelers," he said. She *wanted* to believe him. His will seemed to be adding gravity to her thoughts, pulling them out toward new orbits.

"Sean never tried to do this to me!" Jessica shouted. A cool anger cut through her confusion and she jerked away from this man-who-wasn't-Sean.

She kept her eyes averted and started down the stairs, taking them two at a time.

"Wait," he said, in a soft, demanding voice. "I want to talk with you a little longer."

She didn't look back. When she was around the bend in the stairwell she said, "There is no such thing as time travelers," trying to sound like a zombie, hoping that might satisfy him.

When she got out the front door, she began running down the street. It was starting to snow, and the drifting flakes made her feel cheerful and buoyant. Sean was gone—back to his world—she couldn't think about that too much right now. But he *hadn't* been playing games with her. She believed that he did love her. And there *was* a future. She kept running, block after block, snowflakes darting into her open mouth.

A few blocks from her house she nearly collided with Carl Beck. He was walking slowly, with his hands buried deep in his pockets. They wound up standing still and facing each other, nearly nose to nose.

"What are you doing around here again?" Jessica demanded.

"Just taking a little walk," Carl said. "Or a long walk, maybe." He hadn't started displaying his annoying grin yet.

She reached out, placed her hands on either side of his face and tried to look directly into his eyes. He stiffened but didn't try to move away.

"Hey," Carl said. At first his eyes darted back and forth but then he settled down, accepting her odd behavior. She gazed straight into his pupils, trying to get down deep inside.

After a minute Jessica dropped her hands to her sides. She stepped around Carl and began walking toward her house. Out loud, she said:

"For a second—I almost thought I saw something in there."

In a moment, Carl turned and began to follow behind her, matching her pace. ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

by Bruce Sterling

art: Pat Morrissey

The author's 1989 short-story collection, *Crystal Express*, includes five tales originally published in *IAsfm*—"Dinner in Audoghast" (May 1985), "Green Days in Brunei" (October 1985), "The Beautiful and the Sublime" (June 1986), "Flowers of Edo" (May 1987), and "The Little Magic Shop" (October 1987). Mr. Sterling's most recent novel, *Islands in the Net*, was a finalist for last year's Hugo award.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Sword of Damocles" is an ancient Greek story with the deeply satisfying structure of classical legend. It's chock-full of eternal human truths, which, believe-you-me, still have plenty of meaning and relevance, even for our so-called-sophisticated, postmodern generation.

I've been looking the story over lately, and the material is great. It's just a question of filing off a few serial numbers, and bringing it up-to-date. So here we go.

Once upon a time, there was a man named Damocles, a minor courtier at the palace of Dionysius, Tyrant of Syracuse. Damocles was unhappy with his role, and he envied the splendor of the Tyrant.

Actually the term "Tyrant" is a bit misleading here, because it didn't mean at the time what it means today. All "tyrant" really meant was that Dionysius (405 B.C.–367 B.C.) had seized the government by force, rather than coming to power legitimately. It doesn't necessarily mean that Dionysius was an evil thug. After all, it's results that count, and sometimes one has to bend the rules a bit, just to get things started.

Take this "Once upon a time" business I just used, for instance. It starts the story all right, but it doesn't sound very Greek, when you come right down to it. It's more of a Grimm Brothers fairy-tale riff, kind of a kunstmarchen thing. Using it with a Greek myth is like putting a peaked Gothic doorway on a Greek temple. Some people—Modernist critics—might say it's a bad move aesthetically, and kind of bastardizes the whole artistic effort!

Of course, real hi-falutin' Modernist critics must have a pretty hard time of it lately. They must find life a trial. I bet they don't watch much MTV. Modernists like coherent, systematic structures, but it's all hybridized by now. Especially in the places that are really moving, like Tokyo. Postmodern Japan is like a giant Shinto temple with smokestacks. Culturally speaking, the whole place is a chimera, but people don't criticize Japan's set-up much, because capitalistically speaking they're kicking everybody's ass. Whatever works, man.

You know—this is amazing, but I swear it's true—there are people nowadays who literally live in Tokyo "once upon a time." They're bankers and stockbrokers from New York and London, and they moved to Tokyo as expatriates, because they had to settle the Tokyo time-zone. It's a fact! Postmodern bankers have to do twenty-four-hour trading, and the stock-market closes in New York hours before it opens in London. So nowadays all the big financial operators send people out to major markets all around the world, to colonize Time. "Time" is just another postmodern commodity now.

So that kind of blows my opening sentence, but the important thing is to get the story across. Simply, directly, in an unpretentious, naturalistic fashion. So forget the Gothic fairy-tale riff. I'm just gonna tell it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

straight. The way I'd talk to close friends, in my own living room, here in Austin, Texas.

So y'all listen up. There was this dude named Damocles, see, and he used to hang out in this palace, in Sicily. Ancient Sicily. Damocles was Greek though, not Italian, because, y'see, way back then . . . This was before Rome got started, and the Greeks were really good sailors, so they got all these remote colonies started up. . . .

Okay, never mind the historical analysis, y'all. It's kinda vital to the background, but I can't get it across in this casual hick tone of voice without making it sound really goofy. So let's stick to the drama, okay? The important plot-thing is that Damocles really envies his boss, this magnificent prince, Dionysius. So one day Damocles puts on his chiton—that's a kind of Greek tunic—and his buskins—those were tall sandals like you see in the opera, if you ever go to those, which I don't, personally. But you've probably seen them on public TV, right?

In fact, now that I mention it, since we're all here in my living room, why don't we just give this up, and watch some TV? I mean, forget this "oral storytelling tradition." When was the last time you listened to some pal of yours tell a story out loud? I don't mean lies about what he and his pals did last Friday, I mean a real myth-type story with beginning middle and end. And a moral.

Let's face it, we don't really do that anymore. We postmoderns don't live in an oral story-telling culture. If we want a story we can all enjoy together, we can rent a goddamn video. *Near Dark* is pretty good. My treat.

So, yeah—if I'm gonna make this work, it's gonna have to be *literary*. It'll have to hit some kind of high archaic note. We'll have to really get into it—tell it, not like postmoderns, but just as the ancient Greeks would have told it. Simple, dignified, classical, and stately. Full of *gravitas*, and *hubris*, and similar impressive terms. We'll cast a magic net of words, something to take us across the centuries . . . back to the authentic, ancestral world of Western culture!

So let's envision it. We're in an olive grove together, on a hillside in ancient Athens. I'm the mythagogue, probably some blind or lame guy, kept alive for my storytelling skills. I may be a slave, like Aesop. I'm making up (or reciting from memory) these marvelous mythic tales that will last forever, but I'm no particular big deal, personally.

You, my audience, on the other hand, look really great. You're all young rambunctious aristocrats whose parents are paying for this. Your limbs are oiled, your hair is curled, every one of you is a whiz at the discus and javelin. Some of you are naked, but nobody cares; even the snappiest dressers are essentially wearing tablecloths held together with big bronze pins.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Did I mention that you were all guys? Sorry, but yeah. Those of you who are young rambunctious women are, uhmmm . . . well, I'm afraid you're off weaving chitons in the darkest part of your house. You don't get to listen to mythagogues. It might give you ideas. In fact you don't get to leave the house at all. We guys will be back to see you, sometime after midnight. After we get drunk with Socrates. Then we'll have our jolly way with you.

And we'll probably get you pregnant. Decent contraception hasn't been invented yet. At least, not the nifty plastic-wrapped kinds people will use in the late twentieth century. That's one reason why Damocles has a very dear male friend called Pythias.

But wait a sec—since I'm an authentic Greek mythagogue, I have to call him "Phyntias." "Pythias" was called "Phyntias," originally. A medieval scribe made a mistake transcribing the story in the fourteenth century, and he's been "Pythias" ever since. There's even a high-minded twentieth-century club called "The Pythian Society," that's named after a misprint! What a joke on them, huh? Goes to show what can happen if a storyteller gets careless!

So anyway, Damocles and Pythias were two close friends who lived in the court of Dionysius. One day, Damocles offended the Tyrant, and was sentenced to death. Damocles begged a few day's mercy, to bid farewell to his family, who lived in another town.

But the cruel Dionysius refused him this mercy. At that point, the noble Pythias stepped forward. "I will stand in the place of my dear friend, Damocles," he declared, to the assembled court. "If he does not return in seven days, I will die in his place!"

The vindictive heart of Dionysius was touched by this strange offer. Curious to see the outcome, he granted the boon. The two friends embraced and wept, and Damocles left to carry the sad news to his family. Pythias, in his place, was clapped in a dungeon. Days passed, one by one.

Wait a minute. Damn! Did I say "Damocles"? I meant "Damon." It's "Damon and Pythias," not "Damocles." Hell, I always get those two confused.

Christ on a Harley, man! I was off to such a great start, too. I was really rolling there for a minute. Now look at me! I don't even have a character in my story. There's no *real* character here except *me*, the author.

I can't believe I got myself into this situation. I mean, that postmodernist lit-mag experimental stuff where authors use themselves as characters. That kind of crap really burns me up. I'm a sci-fi pop writer, myself. I write action-adventure stuff. Sure, it's weird, but it's not *structurally* weird; it's weird 'cause it's about weird *ideas*, like fractals and cranial jacks.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But now look at me. Not only am I a character in my own story, but my only real topic so far is "narrative structure." I can't stand it when postmodern critics talk about stories in terms like "narrative structure." These hardhat deconstruction-workers harass stories as if they were gals passing by on the sidewalk. They yell out stuff that's not only obnoxious, but completely bizarre and impenetrable. It's like they yell: "Hey, check out the pelvic bio-mechanics on that babe! What a set of hypertrophied lactiferous tissues!"

I should have stuck to hard-SF, that's my real problem. It was clear from the beginning this was going to be one of those weird-ass historical-fantasy things. I'm not even the proper author to be a character in this story. What this story needs is a character like Tim Powers, author of *The Anubis Gates* and *On Stranger Tides*.

"Suddenly, Tim Powers appeared. He looked about himself alertly."

No, if I'm gonna do this at all, I'd better try it Powers-style.

"Suddenly, Tim Powers burst headlong into the story! His hair was on fire, and he was perched on a pair of stilts. Gnashing his teeth, he glared wildly from under layers of peeling clown-makeup and said:

" 'What the heck kind of fictional set-up is this? There's nothing here but some kind of half-collapsed ancient Greek stage-set! I could do better research than this in my sleep! Anyway, I prefer Victoriana.' "

And then a voice emerged into the story from an area of narrative discourse we can't even reach from here. It said, "–'–"Tim, what's going on in there?"–'–"

And Powers said: " 'I dunno, sweetheart, I was just sitting here at the word-processor, and—ow! Somebody set my hair on fire! Serena, get the shotgun!' "

Aw, jeez! . . . uhm:

"Tim Powers quickly disappeared from the story. The makeup disappeared from his face, he looked just like he always did. And his hair stopped burning. There was no real damage done to it. He went into the bathroom of his Santa Ana apartment, got a comb, and lent fresh meaning to his hair. Then he forgot he had ever been involved in this story."

" 'Don't bet on it, pal.' "

I swear it'll never happen again. Don't get mad! Lots of writers do it. Like the wife of Damocles, "Pandora." She's not the original Greek-legend Pandora, wife of Epimetheus. Pandora hasn't appeared in this story yet, but she's a really interesting character. She likes to make blunt declarations to the reader, from a really weird narrative stance. Stuff like:

" 'Am I not the sister of Adolf Hitler and Anne Frank? Have I not eaten, drunk, and breathed poison all my life? Do you take me for an innocent, my colluding reader?" That sort of thing.

"Pandora" is actually the thinly disguised author-character from Ur-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sula K. Le Guin's experimental SF epic *Always Coming Home*! How "Pandora" got into this story I'm not really sure, I guess it's my mistake, but I'll fight any man who claims that *Always Coming Home* isn't "real SF!" Even if it's not really, exactly, a "book." For one thing, *Always Coming Home* has got an audiotape that comes with it, which puts a pretty severe dent in its narrative closure. I'd have liked to supply an audiotape with this story—maybe some Japanese pop music, or John Cage—but I was too cheap. Instead, I'll just play the *Always Coming Home* tape here in my office. I ordered it from a P.O. box in Oregon. It's got weird mellow chanting in made-up languages.

So much for Pandora. I was going to have a scene where Damocles wakes up in bed with Pandora, and she makes some biting remarks about having to weave the chitons and everything, but I guess you get the idea.

So here's Damocles quickly leaving his home and going straight to work. He's so eager to start the story that, not only does he jump right in with a Homeric "in medias res" routine, but he's willing to settle for a breathless present-tense. Damocles works as a minor Palace official in the court of Dionysius. Actually he's a "flatterer," according to Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. He's not a bureaucrat, like a postmodern official. There's no bureaucracy in Syracuse, it's all done by a tiny group of elite families, who run everything. Syracuse is a pre-industrial city of maybe fifty thousand people. An independent city-state about the size of Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Damocles earns his living by making up flattering things about people who can kill him out-of-hand. He's kind of a jackleg-poet crossed with a public-relations flack. He's done pretty well by it, considering his lowly birth. He gets to eat meat almost every week. For most other Greeks of the period, common folk, there are two kinds of dietary staple. The first is a kind of mush, and the second is a kind of mush.

Damocles, though, has pretty much reached the top of his career arc. Once the Tyrant has taken you into the Palace and deigned to feed you, there's not a whole lot of room for further advancement. Everything else is pretty much determined by birth, or coup d'etat. Damocles doesn't have the birth, and if a coup d'etat came Damocles would probably get snuffed first-thing for being a loudmouth intellectual.

Damocles could enlist in the army and join one of the incessant minor wars of Dionysius, but he'd probably get nicked in battle and die of infection or tetanus. There's a damn good chance he'd croak of dysentery without ever leaving the camp-tents. Homer's war-brags don't talk about sickness much, but it's there all right. There's even a killer plague of the period called "the sweats" which Thucydides talks about in his histories; it once killed off half of Athens. Nobody knows what kind of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

disease "the sweats" was or where it came from. We'd just better hope it never comes back.

So Damocles goes to the court, dressed in his second-best outfit, since the day doesn't augur much. Damon and Pythias are there; Damocles has known them since they were kids; he knows pretty much everybody who counts in Syracuse, since it's a small town. Ever since D&P won the favor of Dionysius, through this stunt they pulled through offering to die for each other, they've been big cheeses at the court. Damocles has had to make up a lot of flattering dithyrambs and iambics and anapaests about them; he's just about run out of rhymes for "Phyntias" and wishes the guy would change his goddamn name.

Today though he finds to his surpise that there's a big celebration. Three of Dionysius's war-galleys are back from raiding the coast of Egypt, where they sank a few reed-boats and got some slaves and loot. It's a famous victory. There's lots of millet-beer and grape-wine.

Damocles elbows his way through the revelers and helps himself. The wine quickly goes to his head. Nobody knows what "fermentation" is yet, so the quality of the wine varies a lot. Every once in a while it makes you puke on the spot, but sometimes it gets way up to four, five percent alcohol. This is prime stuff all the way from Greece, and it only tastes a little of the tar they use to seal the amphoras. Damocles gets totally plastered.

Dionysius is in one of his jolly moods. The kind where he thinks up ingenious psychological tortures for his hangers-on. He calls the drunken, tottering Damocles front-and-center to have him immortalize the glorious day in extemporaneous verse.

Damocles gives it his best shot. He picks up a goatskin tambourine and starts banging it against his hip so he can remember the proper meter. He spouts out a lot of the canned stuff from Homer, the cliched "epithets" you use when you can't think of anything original, like "So-and-so of the nodding plumed helmet," and "his armor rang about him as he fell," and even stuff that sounds vaguely comical nowadays, like "he bit the dust."

But he can see it's not working. He starts to get desperate. He starts babbling out whatever comes to his head. Free association, surrealism. We postmoderns are really into that kind of stuff since Max Ernst and Dada, but it doesn't cut much ice with ancient Dionysius.

So Damocles plays his last ace, and starts laying on the flattery with a trowel. What a lucky guy Dionysius is; how the Gods smile on him; how supreme the Tyrant's power is; how everybody wishes they were him.

"Oh really," interrupts Dionysius, with that awful smile of his. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gives some orders to his lithe teenage male wine-bearer and then beckons Damocles forward. "So you want to be the Tyrant, eh?"

"Yeah, sure, who wouldn't?" says Damocles.

"Fine," says Dionysius loudly. "You sit right here on my throne—" actually, it's a dining-couch "—and help yourself to this feast. You, the humble Damocles, can be Tyrant, just for today!" He takes the gold fillet from his head and places it on the sweating noggin of Damocles. "You can give the orders. See how much you enjoy it."

"Gosh, thanks!" says Damocles. "Hot dog!" The cup-bearer has mysteriously disappeared, but Damocles, who's somewhat partial to women, has one of the new Egyptian slave-girls do the honors for him. Soon he's eating chunks of roast-boar, knocking back goblets of honey-mead, and making satirical wise-cracks that have the whole court in stitches. There's a bit of nervousness in their laughter, but Damocles writes it off to the oddity of the situation.

Just to break the ice, he issues a few tentative Tyrannical orders. He forces some of the more elderly and dignified courtiers to imitate goats or donkeys. It's good clean fun.

Then Damocles spots a disquieting reflection in the polished bronze of his mead-cup. He looks up. The wine-bearer of Dionysius has shinnied high up into the palace rafters. He's got a sharp, heavy bronze sword, and he's tied it to the rafter with a single woolen thread. The sword is dangling, point-first, directly over the reclining torso of Damocles.

"What's the meaning of this?" Damocles says.

Dionysius, who has been watching and chuckling from the sidelines, steps forward. He crosses his arms, and strokes his royal beard. "This," he says, "is the true nature of political power. This is the daily terror that we Tyrants must live under, which you thoughtless subjects somehow fail to appreciate." He laughs deep in his kingly chest.

"I get it," Damocles says. "It's a metaphor. Kind of a koan."

"That's right," says Dionysius. "Now go on, Damocles, enjoy yourself. You won't be leaving that couch for some time."

"Good thing, I was just getting comfortable," says Damocles, and he pillows his head on an enormous bundle of two hundred pounds of primed TNT. He's been carrying this massive weight of explosive with him all the time, wired to his body in a kind of backpack.

In fact, everybody in the Palace has got a TNT-bundle of their own, too. They just haven't really noticed it, until the situation was made metaphorically clear. Everybody in Syracuse has their own share of explosive. Every man woman and child on the planet; even the innocent babes in their cradles. Everybody carries their share of the global megatonnage; they're never without it, even when they somehow manage to forget about it. They just lug it around, day in day out, because they

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have to; because it's the postmodern condition. The cost of it nearly bankrupts them, and the weight wears calluses on their souls, but nobody dwells on the horror of it much. It's the only way to stay sane.

So, with a merry laugh, Damocles has two of the guards seize Dionysius, which they do with a will. They demonstrate to him some of the unappreciated hazards of living like a peasant, instead of a king. They start by ripping out several of his teeth, without health insurance. Then they do some other things to him which are even funnier, and finally leave him penniless and ragged in the streets.

So much for the famous legend of "The Sword of Damocles." I hope you've enjoyed it. Damocles went on to live it up happily ever after, in his merry, pranksterish way, until he got gout, or cirrhosis, or a bad cocaine habit, or AIDS.

As for Dionysius, he retired to California, where he now lives. He often appears on talk-shows, and makes lucrative speaking-tours before Chambers of Commerce and political action committees. He is writing a set of memoirs defending his public-service record. He's looking for a movie-option, too. But it's okay—I don't think he'll get one. ●

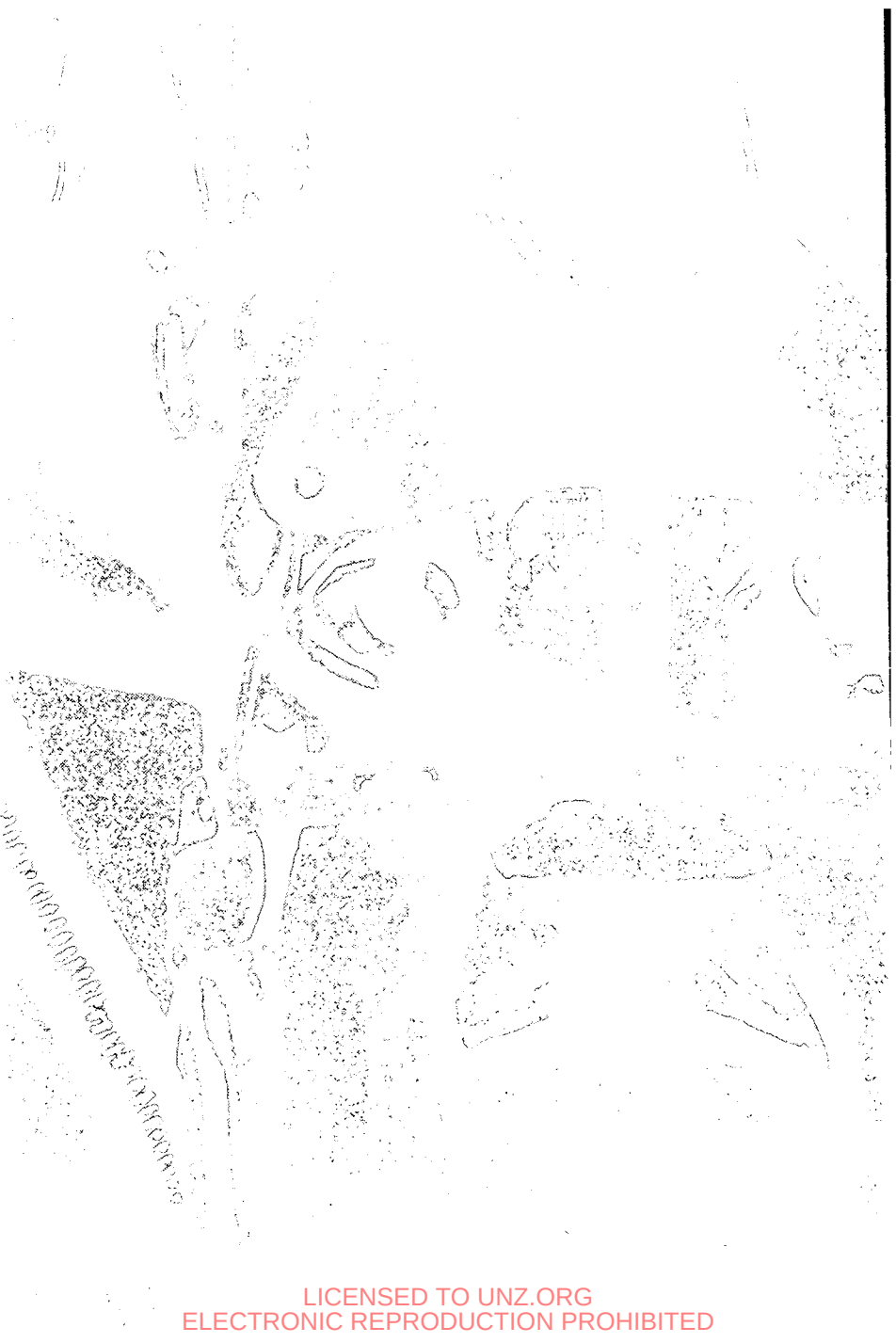
NEXT ISSUE

Rob Chilson returns to these pages after a long absence with our March cover story, "Gerda and the Wizard," plunging us deep into Dark Age Britain for an encounter with mystery and magic that may be considerably more than just the stuff of legends... From the world of knights and serfs and Dark Age Feudalism, **Steven Gould,** also returning after a long absence, then fastforwards us to a hard-edged, high-tech future with a heart of darkness of its own, for a suspenseful tale of murder and obsession, in "Simulation Six." Then Nebula-winner **John Kessel** takes us sideways in time, to a world unlike any you've seen before, for the eloquent, gripping, and *very* strange story of "Buddha Nostril Bird."

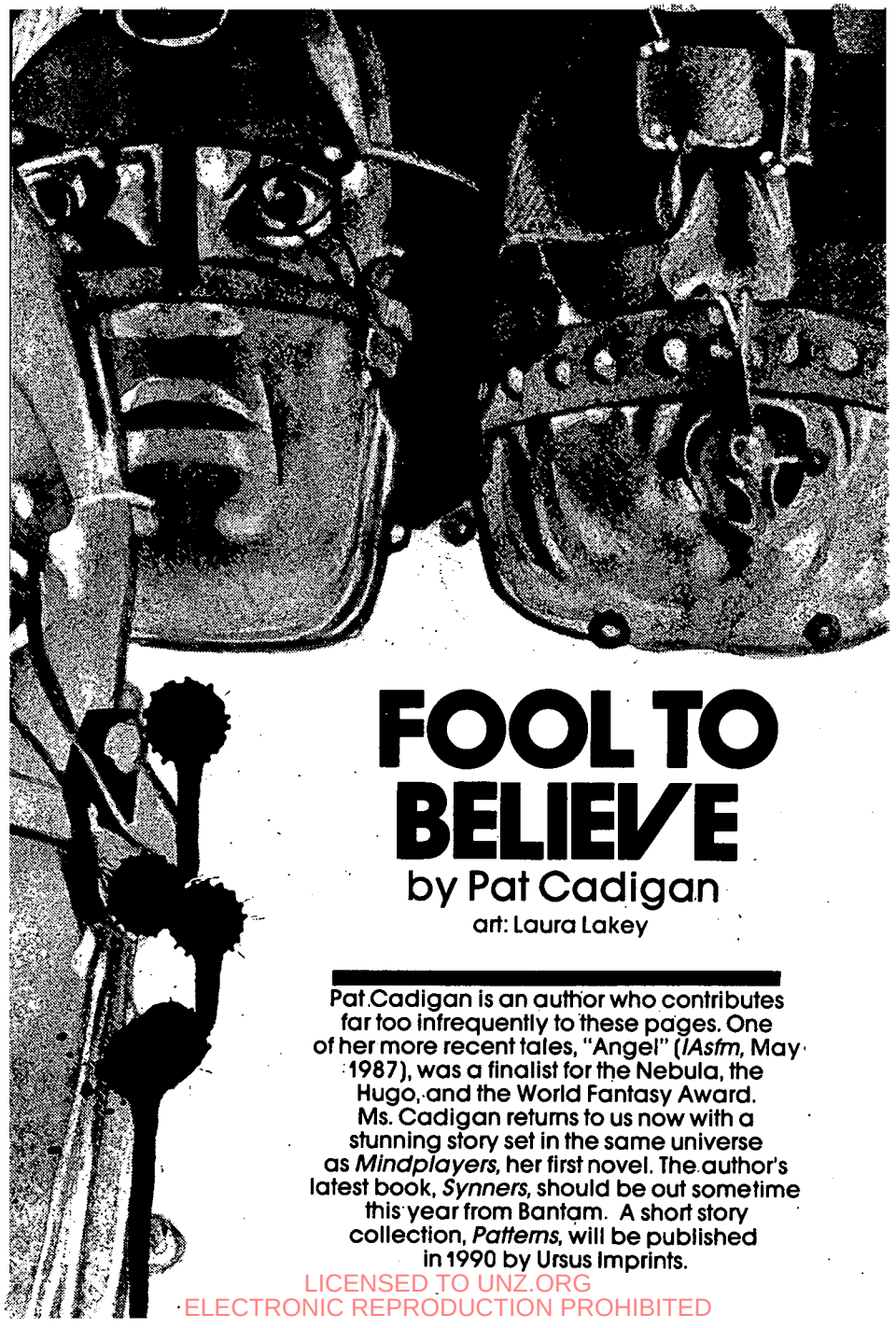
ALSO IN MARCH: World Fantasy Award-winner **John Crowley,** author of *Little, Big,* makes a brilliant *IAsfm* debut with an evocative tale of a curious encounter with the Ancient World, in "Missolonghi 1824"; **Janet Kagan** takes us back to the frontier world of Mirabile for another strange adventure, this one a fiery, fast-paced confrontation with "The Flowering Inferno"; **Bradley Denton** makes *his IAsfm* debut with a bone-chilling account of "Captain Coyote's Last Hunt"; National Book Award-winner **Lisa Goldstein** returns to take us to a near-future world where the fate of the entire human race hangs upon the whim of a bitter old woman, in "Midnight News"; new writer **Maureen McHugh** returns to explore the gritty Underworld of a glittering high-tech future, in the melancholy saga of "The Queen of Marincite"; and Hugo-winner **Damon Knight,** writer, critic, and editor, one of the true giants of our field, returns with an incisive and witty article exploring the odd phenomenon of Writer's Workshops, in the warmly anecdotal "I Remember Clarion." Plus an array of columns and features. Look for our March issue on sale on your newsstands on February 6, 1990.

COMING SOON: Big new stories by **Joe Haldeman, Pat Murphy, Walter Jon Williams, Bruce McAllister, Sharon N. Farber, John Barnes, S.P. Somtow,** and many others.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



FOOL TO BELIEVE

by Pat Cadigan

art: Laura Lakey

Pat Cadigan is an author who contributes far too infrequently to these pages. One of her more recent tales, "Angel" (*IAsfm*, May 1987), was a finalist for the Nebula, the Hugo, and the World Fantasy Award. Ms. Cadigan returns to us now with a stunning story set in the same universe as *Mindplayers*, her first novel. The author's latest book, *Synners*, should be out sometime this year from Bantam. A short story collection, *Patterns*, will be published in 1990 by Ursus Imprints.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sovay had dyed himself a delicate orange. It wasn't his color. He was sitting nude on a floormat with his legs folded and his hands resting on the junction of his ankles. Someone had piled pillows between his back and the wall for support—the regular police, probably. Suckers weren't known to be that considerate. His long straight hair, a shade or two darker than his skin, was pushed back from his slack face and there were traces of blood beneath his unfocused jade eyes. A faint whistling sound came from between his parted lips every time he exhaled.

I squatted in front of him and pulled gently at his lower eyelids. A thin mixture of blood and tears spilled onto my thumbs. Poor Sovay. They hadn't been any too gentle with him. There was no sign of a struggle in the living room but Sovay and his wife Rowan weren't much for furnishings. Pillows and mats were the extent of it, with indirect wall-well lighting. It was like being in a tomb. Or maybe a womb.

Rowan's voice came to me from the hallway. "In there. Through that door." I stood up and moved aside as three paramedics came in with a stretcher.

"Dirty shame," said the chief paramed, kneeling down in front of Sovay with a vitals kit. The other two unfolded the stretcher in silence, not bothering with any facial expressions. "You the Brain Police, ma'am?"

I nodded, showing him the ID on my belt. He squinted at it briefly.

"Heya, Mersine. Regular police seen him yet?"

"Yah. He's all yours."

The paramed took Sovay's blood pressure with a Quik-Kuff. "Any idea who did it?"

"I just got here myself."

"Dirty shame. *Dirty* shame." The paramed's bald, blue-tinted head wagged from side to side. "Used to be that was the one thing they couldn't take from you. And they're getting so *bold.*"

I looked across the room at Rowan. She had pulled a hookah out of the wall and was sucking contemplatively on the mouthpiece. Everything around here seemed to be squirreled away out of sight. I turned back just in time to see the paramed extract Sovay's eyes. I hadn't needed to see that just then. More tears and blood dribbled down Sovay's face as the paramed shut down the optic nerve connections.

"Mighty nice biogems," he said, pausing to examine the eyes. "Brand new, too. He didn't get much use out of them." He slipped them into a jar in the kit, where they stared like unclaimed marbles. "*Dirty shame.* I mean, those *suckers.*" He stopped up Sovay's ears and gave him an intravenous pop. "In through the optic nerve like a vacuum cleaner, suck you dry." He lifted Sovay's arm to test his pliability and then maneuvered him into a supine position so the other parameds could slip the stretcher

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

under him. "They musta wanted him pretty bad to risk coming in after him this way." His brow wrinkled nearly to his bald crown.

I looked over at Rowan again. She seemed not to have heard. The perfumed smoke from the hookah had drifted across the room; it smelled appetizing but not too dopey.

"Who was he?" said the paramed. "I mean, who did he used to be?"

"His name was Sovay. He was an actor."

"Oh." The paramed leaned close. "He musta been some hot up-and-comer, but personally, I never hearda him." He waved at his two assistants and they took Sovay out.

"Did you want to see his studio," Rowan said, after a long moment of silence. She was studying the pipe mouthpiece as if it were something completely new. "They broke in there, too, but there wasn't anything to take. Just mirrored walls and carpeting. Sovay kept it locked because he said it shut his vibrations in and other people's out." She took another drag on the pipe and blew the smoke toward the ceiling. "Does it make sense if you're the Brain Police?"

Dealing with the family is something you never quite get used to. "I don't need to see his studio, not with the regular police checking it out." I hesitated. "When they're done, I'll give you a lift to the hospital, if you like."

She shook her head. "There wouldn't be much point in that." Her gaze went to the mat where he'd been, as if she were just now noticing he was gone. "Do you want coffee? All I have are cubes. They're good, though." She blinked several times in that dazed way people do when they find themselves in the middle of a catastrophe and aren't sure of the etiquette. But her movements were unhesitating as she shut off the hookah and put it away. She was a small, compact woman, a shade on the plump side and looking more so in a pouch suit. Unlike her husband, she wasn't much for dye-jobs or other flash. Her skin was untouched, and so was her ripply shoulder-length brown hair. Her only affectation was the set of pearlized brown biogem eyes. They gave her round face an odd, blind look.

Surprisingly, there was conventional furniture in the kitchen, a table and four chairs. Or maybe that wasn't so surprising—even the most dedicated floor-sitters probably craved a chair now and then. I sat down and Rowan served me mechanically: cup of water, spoon, napkin, jar of cubes.

"How do you take it?"

For a moment, I wasn't sure what she meant. "Tan."

"The cubes in the gold wrappers're tan. The white are tan with sugar, the pink are sweet black, the black ones are black." She shrugged and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deposited herself in a chair as I peeled a gold-wrapped cube and dropped it into my cup. The water foamed up in an instant boil.

"Why did they do that to him?" she asked. "Take out his eyes, plug his ears?"

"First aid." I stirred down the bubbles in the cup. "Too much sensory input can be adverse for an involuntary mindwipe. The pop was a tactile desensitizer as well as a sedative. It'll keep him out till they get him into quarantine."

"Oh." She piled one hand on the other.

I've always thought murder must be easier in a way. The involuntary mindwipe—mindsuck—is just as gone, except the trappings of a live body remain to confound the survivors. A mindsuck is interred not in a grave but in a special quarantine to allow the development of a new mind and personality. Sometimes the new person is a lot like the old one. Most of the time, however, it's only spottily reminiscent of the person that had been, as though the suck had freed an auxiliary person that had always been there, just waiting for the elimination of the primary personality. There was still a lot of controversy between the behaviorists and the biologists over that and plenty of theories but no clear-cut explanations.

Regardless, the new mind was definitely Somebody Else, a stranger with no ties to the previous inhabitant of the brain. Someone told me once it was a lot easier to accept if you had enough of a mystic bent toward a belief in reincarnation, but I couldn't exactly tell Rowan to take comfort in the study of the Great Wheel of Life.

"Well," she said after a bit. "Have the Brain Police ever recovered any, ah, anyone?"

A common question. You'd think in the Age of Fast Information there wouldn't be blank spots or misconceptions. You have to tell them the truth, but I hate it, even if lying is worse. "Never intact," I said, and took a sip of coffee. She'd been right, they were good cubes. The damnedest things make an impression on you at the damnedest times. "Most suckers part out minds as quickly as possible. They—" I stopped.

Tell her about a chop shop? Sure—then follow up with a description of how they'd dig out Sovay's self-contained memories with all the finesse of a chimpanzee digging grubs with a pointed stick, working fast because a hot mind wouldn't keep in a jury-rigged hold-box. Any excised memories that could unambiguously identify the mind would be flushed and whatever remained of his talent sold. There would still be a fair number of associations clinging to it but people who buy from suckers don't fuss about a few phantoms. Nor do they complain if the merchandise is half-mutilated from rushed pruning.

Anything left over after that would be sold, too. It still surprised me that there were lowlifes who would buy sucker leftovers but some people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will buy anything. Which meant that there might be someone with Sovay's taste in clothes and someone else with his taste in decor and still someone else with his taste in sex.

—Unless the suckers had a buyer for the whole thing, someone who wanted a whole new personality. That didn't happen often. The franchise stuff was too cheap and too available for anyone who wanted a persona overlay. But it wasn't unheard of, either; a persona overlay isn't quite the same thing as getting a whole new personality. Nobody's terribly sure of the differences, however, because nobody's managed to transplant a personality successfully.

I realized I was glaring at my coffee cup. "They, uh, they have to. Work quickly, that is," I said lamely, finishing a sentence neither of us cared about any more.

"I see." Rowan exhaled noisily. "Then it hardly matters whether you catch the mindsuckers or not, does it? I mean, for Sovay or for me. He couldn't be restored even if you found him."

I should have made the parameds give her something for shock, I thought. Seeing to the well-being of the family was really more the province of the regular police; one of them should have been with us but they were probably working shorthanded again. The budget being what it was, I was working shortminded myself.

"No," I said slowly, "perhaps it doesn't matter. Unless we catch them and keep them from doing someone else."

Rowan's mouth twitched. "You'll excuse me if I don't seem to care about anyone but myself at the moment."

"Of course. Is there someone you can stay with?"

"You mean someone to look after the bereaved widow, spoon broth into her mouth, cut up her meat for her, slip her tranquilizers?" The brown pearl eyes slid away from me disinterestedly. "No. I'll manage on my own."

We sat in silence until we heard the regular police coming into the living room.

The regular police had little to tell me. Sovay's attackers hadn't left much in the way of traces. Most likely the b&e had been jobbed out to specialists who had taken off as soon as the suckers were in. The b&e pros seldom stole anything on these runs—too traceable. Burglars don't usually want to turn into accessories to mindsuck. So there we were. The Age of Fast Information meant we could find out we didn't know anything five times faster than we could fifty years ago.

Rowan remained firm in her refusal to go to the hospital so I left her my number and drove back to headquarters. I'm one of those people who prefers driving manually both land and air. It's somewhere between a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

game and therapy, clears my mind, helps me think better. Traffic was fairly heavy so I had plenty of time to go over things.

Hanging above the river while I waited for the signal to descend and merge into land traffic, I put a Gladney spike in the deck and turned on all eight speakers. Gladney was another mindsuck and this spike was an old one, music composed by his original personality, what they called a first edition.

It was scary how so many artists of various kinds were getting sucked these days. Since the breakthrough in myelin sheath restoration, it had become possible for a brain to stand up to a greater number of complete wipes than the former limit of two. It used to be that a third wipe left a subject at about the level of an acorn squash, only not so long-lived. But now you could have yourself wiped annually—or you could have if government regulations hadn't been tightened. Even with the restrictions, requests for voluntary mindwipe had quadrupled. So had involuntary mindwipe—mindsuck.

My dash buzzer went off to tell me I had the right of descent and I leaned gently on the stick. Sovay had barely obtained a reputation as a promising actor except among hard-core live-theatre aficionados. An esoteric victim, but suckers made it their business to scout out new talent. New talent was a hell of a lot easier to get at and sucker customers liked the idea of acquiring a talent in the semi-rough, with most of the failure supposedly sanded off. Then they could refine it to suit themselves. Stardom the easy way. In theory. In practice—

Well. You can warn people about buying from suckers, tell them horror stories about what happens to you when you buy sucked merchandise only to have it go rotten with trauma in a living brain, you can legislate and over-legislate every angle, but you can't make people believe they won't get around the problems of buying something not only out of their aptitudes but unclean and taken by force. The legit Mind Exchange used a procedure that took anywhere from a few weeks to several months to clean out an ability sold legally and even they couldn't guarantee there wouldn't be some mild phantoms. A few years ago, my brother bought someone's painting talent—he'd always wanted to fill out his arty streak and become a full-fledged portrait painter—and found that every time he picked up a brush, he craved to smell fresh cedar. Last time I'd seen him, he'd had a pocket full of wood chips. Stunk like somebody's antique hope chest.

Well, if someone wanted to sell off a part of the mind as though it were any old heirloom out of the attic, it wasn't my concern even if I couldn't see the virtue of it. Maybe both seller and buyer were better off, but so far, no one had made history with secondhand talent. Even so, that was voluntary. No one volunteered to get sucked.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Traffic came to a standstill in Commerce Canyon, so I requested permission to go airborne again. Central Traffic Control took ten minutes to get back to me and tell me I could underfly the crosstown air express at my own risk and liability. I nearly got my hood crumpled but it saved me an hour.

My supervisor Carita Salazar was one of those tube-thin women who felt obesity was an anti-social act. In a crowded world, she was fond of saying, it is obnoxious to take up more than your share of space. As far as I was concerned, her philosophy was *her* problem; my quarrel was with how she defined obesity, which was anyone who wasn't thirty pounds underweight, me for certain. To her credit, she'd stopped hinting around about diets and surgical pruning after the first month we worked together and she did manage to keep a professional attitude in the face of my mass which, next to hers, was True Bulk.

She was having a Chew-and-Spit when I arrived at her office. Chew-and-Spit was her way of dealing with her lust for food. No drugs or surgery for her—she was too proud of her self-control. And none of that edible polyester, either; Salazar was a real-food gourmet.

Today she had a pocket sandwich. All the time I was telling her about Sovay, she would take a bite of her sandwich, chew it slowly and sensuously enough to make *masticate* a dirty word and, when it was all mashed to paste in her mouth, she'd lean forward and spit the mess into the suckhole in her desk. I was one of the few who didn't gag openly at this routine, which may have been why she was tolerant of me. Everyone else in my department was on a diet or pretending to be.

"Any ideas on who did it?" she asked when I was finished. Her mouth was full.

I shifted position in the overstuffed chair. All of Salazar's office furniture was chubby. To make her feel that much thinner, I supposed. "Grandstanding newcomers with something to prove, maybe. The identities tend to get slippery in these cases."

Salazar spat, took a drink of mineral water and spat that out, too. For practice, maybe. Her saggy garnet eyes stared at me skeptically. "What about the grieving widow?" *Bite.*

"She's not an actor so they couldn't have been competitors in the strictest sense, and she has no history of personality disorders or identity buying or selling. No chance we'd be able to get a search warrant for cause and I didn't mention the possibility to her."

Salazar looked disappointed as she spat and took another bite. "If we could justify search warrants on general principle, we'd probably clear up half the unsolved sucks from the last five years."

That kind of talk always made me uncomfortable. Tempting as it is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to a Brain Police officer for the sake of all the victims like Sovay, I didn't like the idea of access-on-demand to someone's memories and I never would. People like Salazar don't seem to understand it as an atrocity.

"Sovay was a bit smaller than the stuff a really big operator might go for," I went on. "He was just moving into Stage One prominence, where he was classified as a talent to watch. The big operators seem to prefer someone who's just a little more of a brand-name without being too traceable. Drives the price up. And they never make housecalls. Someone big *could* be behind it but we'll never connect them with the ones who did the actual suck. The trail will be covered by a lot of selective memory wiping and coding, so the little fish probably think they're working for themselves anyway."

Salazar spat again. "Sounds more complicated than it has to be."

"Suckers always make it more complicated, hoping we'll get lost in the spaghetti."

"Spaghetti," Salazar murmured dreamily. "Did they take anything else?"

"No, and not for lack of trying. They broke into his studio but there was nothing transportable. Probably they were looking for artifacts, familiar things the talent could relate to in its new home."

Spit. "The ancient Egyptians have nothing on us. How do you want to handle it?"

"The way I usually do. Get into the Downs and look around."

She thought about that while she made love to the food in her mouth. Salazar's never been comfortable with the idea that she can't know exactly what the people under her are doing. She'd like to orchestrate everything the same way she'd like to stick her nose into any mind she wanted to. Fortunately, she was behind a desk where she could do only minimal damage. Most of the time.

"If we start asking questions or pulling in likelies, it'll just alert our suckers and maybe every other sucker we'd like to hotbox, and they'll just have themselves wiped so we couldn't get anything on them even if we did find them. *The State vs. Marto.* I quote: 'A mindwipe's new personality may not be held accountable for crimes—' "

Salazar spat forcefully and I shut up. "What about backup?"

I winced. She always did this to me and she should have known better. But that's what happens when you promote administrators with no field experience. "Post them or don't post them, but don't tell me either way. If I don't know, no one else can find out if something goes wrong and I get sucked myself."

"So I've been told. Seems to me we could bury the information in your mind so you wouldn't know it—"

"A sucker would still be able to access it, given enough motivation,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which most of them have," I said, a little impatiently. "Let's not discuss it anymore, all right?"

Salazar nodded, brought the sandwich up to her face and then paused. "Say, you want the rest of this?" She thrust it at me. "I'm full."

"No. Thanks."

"You sure? It'll just go to waste."

"It's not on my diet."

She frowned at me accusingly. "*You* don't diet."

No sense of humor, that woman. She tossed the sandwich into the suckhole, which seemed to choke on it briefly, unused to anything solid after the pap she'd been feeding it. She had nothing further to add so I left her searching her mouth for stray food particles and took myself over to Wardrobe to pick out an appropriate Downs persona.

The Downs was—were?—a free-for-all zone full of cheap dreamlands, memory lanes, trip parlors, storefront talent shops, and street vendors pushing neuroses and psychoses, some of them just a little less legal than others. If Sovay's mind went anywhere at all, it would go there first, where there was plenty of merchandise floating around to camouflage anything that had been parted out. The mutilated remains of a person's identity could disappear pretty quickly there.

I took a quick look at some surveillance footage the regular police had shot a couple of days before. Things hadn't changed much since I'd last been in. The fashion clothingwise was still ragpicker ratatat. No problem there, I'd just get into the closet, throw everything up in the air and wear whatever landed on me. I was more interested in faces. Wearing my own was out of the question, but just getting another wasn't the answer, either. A brand-new face in the Downs could attract dangerous attention from people with cause to be nervous; someone might decide to suck me on general principle. I shot about a dozen stills of faces off the footage and had the computer do me a composite that any Downsite would find subliminally familiar.

The result was no one to fall in love with. Working from the composite, Wardrobe straightened my eyebrows, changed my eyes from clean onyx to cheap sapphire, tacked on a squint, broke my nose, stretched my mouth and ruined my hair with a bad cut and fade. They wanted to mess with some muscles and ligaments to change my posture and movement but I told them there wasn't time. Wardrobe always got carried away; it was all just theatre to them. They settled for coating my vocal cords with what felt like liquid sandpaper, large grain; gave me a nasty gargle on the aspirants. I paired a man's tunic with a colorless plastic skirt and added broken-down boots.

"*Très* authentic," said the Wardrobe Captain. This week, it was a young

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

guy named Flaxie. He was brand new, fresh out of some polytech with a degree in urban camouflage.

"Urban camouflage?" I said. "You can really get a degree in that?"

"Believe it or leave it," he said cheerfully. "I was in theatrical costuming up until almost the last minute but I decided I was more interested in law enforcement than theatre. Theatre's full of neurotics, you know. They'll make you positively nutsoid."

"Do tell."

He flashed me a thousand-watt smile that made him look even younger than he was. "You want an imp, or are you going to brass it out on adrenaline?"

I laughed, gargling. "I'm not excitable enough for adrenaline unassisted. Give me a global imprint, debossed. In case someone wants to check how authentic I really am. If they're in a hurry, which they usually are, they probably won't get all the way through the overlay."

Flaxie prepared a hook-up to the computer system while I mounted a program for myself out of the characteristics-available file. Generally I tried for things that weren't too far from my own quirks and idiosyncrasies so I could slip in and out of character without too much noticeable difference. Just for the hell of it, I added an extraneous nailbiting mannerism. There's nothing like an unconscious habit for verisimilitude. I wondered if Sovay had ever built a character as thoroughly as I was building this one.

I showed my final program to Flaxie for his educated opinion. He took a long time studying it and then gave me an odd look.

"You're sure this is what you want?"

"Is there something wrong with it?"

He seemed to be about to say something. Then he shrugged. "Can you take your own eyes out?"

I could and did. Imprinting wasn't something I was fond of but I could put up with a deboss, which was pressed on from the outside, the mental equivalent of a mask. Emboss was more reliable since it came from within your own personality, but it was a lot harder to clean out later. A global debossed façade personality would pass a glancing inspection for a short period of time if I ended up directly mind-to-mind with some lowlife. The imp had no memory of its own and I could bar it from accessing mine and giving me away. But that was a situation I was planning to avoid.

Flaxie was a real adept. The connections for my optic nerves were primed and a relaxation exercise was already in progress, a swirling colors thing. It went on exactly long enough to let my mind settle into a receiving mode.

The mechanics were the opposite of a mindsuck. If the system operator is any good, the process should be nearly instantaneous (and painless).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a mental moment of the sort of pressure you feel when you're concentrating intensely—

—Guy musta been a juggler in his previous lifetime. I was out in the wide-awake so fast I barely had time to be blind. Not that it made a squat of difference. I don't need eyes to know when I been pulled in by the Brain Police. Right away, my ruff goes up. I can't help it. You never know what they been up to.

"Next time, I'll take care of my *own* eyes, *thank* you so much I'm very *sure!*"

His Blondness just gives me this friendly look at all his teeth. "Take a minute or two. A fresh one's always on a hairtrigger."

Now, this is supposed to make sense? He's been partying with my equipment, I know that.

"Where's my eagle? I want my eagle." I look around but there's no eagle in the room, just him and me and one of those big main-brain banks they use to tapdance on your grey. "Oh, Blondie, you gotta problem here, illegal search and seizure, amnesia without benefit of counsel, hail me the first cab to court—"

He's grinning like I'm the best entertainment he's had in a week. "You in there, Mersine?"

It was what I imagined it must be like to be a program called up within a system. The world lit up like a screen, or maybe I did.

"Yeah." I felt myself relax several degrees. "Yeah, it's me. The imp's pretty solid. Settling now, though. I can feel it." I let my breath out slowly, counting to twenty.

"Remember anything?" Flaxie studied me solemnly.

"Everything." I grinned, mildly embarrassed. "She's pretty obnoxious."

"She's all yours. You want anything modified?"

I thought it over. "Nah. She's fine the way she is. Nobody'll give her a second look in the Downs." I thought some more but there were some curious blank spaces that didn't feel right. "Do I have everything I need? I feel like I'm missing something."

Flaxie nodded. "The imp knows a bit more than you do right now. Not to worry. You'll know it, too, when you're supposed to."

"Right." I took another deep breath, counting it in and out again. "That's the part I've never been too crazy about. Hiding my own information from myself."

"Standard multiple personality stuff. But if it makes you that uncomfortable, we could go back in—"

I shook my head. "It's okay. It's just kind of—" I shrugged. "Weird."

"You think *this* is weird? Costume a road show sometime." He smiled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

briefly and turned toward the system, reaching for something on the panel. Then suddenly he whirled and lunged at me, grabbing a fistful of my tunic. "Who are you, what do you want here?" he barked—

Just like that, we're nose-to-nose. I let out a yell that blew back his eyelashes and most of his hair.

"Marya Anderik, I gotta *thing* about memories, anybody's but *mine*, all *right?* That *bother* you, Blondie?" I got his wrist now. "Let go of me or I'll make you *eat* this hand."

He backed off. "*Mersine.* Come on up."

"Wow," I said around the finger I was chewing on. "That's a good one."

"It's the usual set-up—you control when she comes up and when she goes down again. You, Mersine, that is. Anyone addressing you directly with your real name can bring you up, but only you and I can bring the imp up. Anything you know won't leak over to the imp unless you command it to. Certain situations might make you flash a little but considering what you're supposed to be, nobody in the Downs is going to find your momentary lapse of attention unusual. You'd stick out if you didn't show a little *petit mal* once in a while. Come back when you want it taken off."

He turned back to the system and busied himself with the settings. I let myself out.

When I stopped at sign-out to pick up some informant addresses (the imp had the names, concealed from me; I would only know where to find them), I found a message from Salazar ordering me to take a gun. There was no use trying to explain to her about the dangers of that false sense of security a gun gives you, let alone that there was no reason for my persona to run packed. Some supervisors you can't tell anything, mainly the ones with no field experience. I checked a stinger out of Arsenal and mailed it interoffice to my desk, where it would arrive several hours after I hit the Downs. I had a few steel-pointed combs in my rat's-nest coiffure; if they didn't get lost in there, they'd be enough. If they weren't, then I'd be beyond any help a gun could have given me anyway.

I was just about to leave the building when I got another phone call, addressed simply to *Sovay Case Officer*. Damn that Salazar, I thought, picking up the sound-only receiver in the hall near Sign-Out. How had she found out about the gun so quickly?

But it wasn't Salazar. It was Sovay.

"How do I know you're Sovay?" I said.

The man on the other end of the line laughed weakly. "I guess you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

don't. But trust me, that's who I am. I'm trapped in this, uh, I don't know what he is. It's a he, I can tell you that much. I don't know where I am or why—"

"You said, already. Can't you give me a description, a name, anything?"

"It's all jumbled up in here. It was better back in that other place. I had no body so I just recreated everything in my head. No, I didn't have a head. You know what I mean, though. You have to, you're the Brain Police."

"Just try to remain calm." The officer on Sign-Out duty slid me a chair and a scratch pad while someone else went to get a terminal so I could trace the call. "What seems to have happened is, the mindsuckers who took your mind sold you off to someone intact. But the implant didn't take very well and you're fighting for dominance instead of being assimilated—"

Another weak laugh. "No, that's not it. I mean, they think that's it. Or they thought that was it. But I'm back there, too."

"Back where?"

"In the other place. Where I had no body."

I hesitated. I should have taken this call in my office, but I risked having him hang up in the time it would have taken to sprint back there.

"It's true," he went on, a little breathlessly. "I'm waiting back there, playing for time. I don't know where that is, though. I sent me out—that *I* sent this *me,* I mean—intending to get help. The *me* back there has no way of knowing if *I,* this *I* talking to you, succeeded or just went crazy or what."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not sure—"

He sighed heavily. "They keep trying to send me out, sell me off. Me, just the one person. So I create one of my characters and send *him* out. Do you see? I'm Sovay-in-character, a character from one of the plays I've done. Do you see now?"

I saw. You see all kinds of things in the Brain Police. A disembodied, self-replicating mind was a more bizarre sight than usual, but stranger things have happened. Probably.

"Okay. Which character are you?"

"No, listen, this is important. You have to understand that I'm *not* the character. I'm *Sovay's interpretation of that character.* Do you understand the difference?"

"I'm not sure. Just tell me which character from which play."

"Dennie Moon from *Brickboy.* It's great, about a quiet guy who serves as the living museum of his family's memories. He takes all the most significant ones before any of the relatives die, and he's got them from three generations. But now he's hit his storage capacity and he's got to stop and let someone else pick it up. His successor is his daughter and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he's caught in this threeway conflict where he's jealous because he can't do it anymore but also he realizes it can be a painful experience and she's still very young. But he also wants to keep it all in his own line of descent—really powerful piece of work." He gave a happy sigh. "The character's a good learning role for an actor."

A small light went on in my head. "Ah. Okay, I want you to concentrate—"

"I *am* concentrating. I have to, just to stay up."

"Concentrate harder and tell me why you chose to send Dennie Moon to the person you're in right now."

The silence stretched for so long I was afraid he'd fainted or hung up. "You think there was a particular reason? I couldn't see whoever this is. Maybe Moon was the first character that occurred to him, or the easiest, or both."

Someone slid a terminal in front of me and punched up some information on the screen. Sovay/Moon was calling from a voice-only phone somewhere in the Downs. A blinking bar at the top of the screen informed me the trace was still in progress. You'd think that in the Age of Fast Information, you could get the really important information that much faster. Think again.

"Consider this," I said. "Maybe you chose Moon for this person because he felt like the Dennie Moon type."

Another long silence. "It's possible," he said at last. "I never thought of that."

"Can you kind of feel around in there for any identifying features of your, uh, host mind?"

The young officer who had brought the terminal was staring at me. *Host mind?* he mouthed. I ignored him.

"Uh, I can't see too well. It's dark for me," Sovay/Moon said faintly. "I get a glimpse of a sidewalk sometimes. People dancing around on it. See-through people. Zoot!"

"Say again?"

"I see a word on a sign. The word is 'Zoot.' "

I punched *zoot* into the keyword search program. A moment later a small window in the bottom left corner of the screen opened to inform me that there was a new dreamland in the Downs called The Zoot Mill.

"Is that where you went? To The Zoot Mill?"

"No. That's where I am now. Across the street."

"Can you see anything else? Can you see yourself, what do you look like?"

"I don't know. I feel short. I try to feel my hair or my clothes but something's blocking the input or something. I can't get it."

It sounded like something that might be in character from what he'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

told me about Dennie Moon. Wouldn't you know it, I grumbled to myself, that Sovay would be a Method actor.

"I see my hand!" he cried suddenly. "There's a picture on it, it's smiling at me! It's a woman! It—"

"Hello? Still there, hello?"

He gave a long, miserable sigh. "This guy is making me hang up."

The blinking bar at the top of the screen stopped blinking and gave me the address: a public voice-only phone right across the street from The Zoot Mill. The Age of Fast, Redundant Information. At least I knew he hadn't been hallucinating or lying. "Can you get him to stay there?"

"He's hungry, I think. Something he wants a lot, maybe it's food. He's mad."

"Hold him until I get to you."

"I'll try, but . . . "

"Can you tell me anything else? Anything at all?" Inspiration hit me. "What did Dennie Moon look like in the play?"

"Um, youthful for his age. Black hair down to his shoulders, light green eyes. Stocky-ish build. Why?"

I wrote down the description. "Just an idea. Listen, in a little while, a homely woman with lousy hair and old clothes is going to approach you. Be there."

"Wait!" he yelled suddenly. "Wait! I have something for you! Names! Fortray, Anwar, Easterman!"

The terminal was logging the call so I didn't worry about writing them down. "Who are they?"

"More of Sovay," he said. "That's all I know. More people they sold Sovay to." He paused. "I don't know why I know that. I have to go now. I can't help it."

Resourceful guy, Sovay. I wondered if he'd planted the names in each mind, hoping at least one of them would call the Brain Police. It was too bad he couldn't have been restored; this was some major trick. He must have been one hell of an actor.

"Try to stay where you are." He didn't answer. There was a click as the phone line went dead.

The terminal printed out the three names he'd given, every one of them tagged *U* for *Unknown*. Either they didn't have records or they were new aliases. I folded them up with the informant addresses and took off, leaving everything for the Sign-Out officer to put away.

Of course, he was gone when I got there.

"Heya, heya!" called the man in front of the trip parlor (Sojourn For Truth—Not God But An Incredible Simulation!). "You gotta be paranoid! Can't be too rich or too paranoid these days! Heya, heya, hey-*ya!*" He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

caught my arm as I started to go in. The cracked imitation-leather armor over his longjohns squealed with the movement. Stars twinkled in his teeth; he spat a few into the air between us. They must have been hell on his gums but neurosis peddlers are all goofy for special effects. "How about you, madam? You may think you're paranoid, but are you paranoid *enough?*" His tacky moonstone eyes searched my face as more multicolored stars sailed out of the corner of his mouth. Two spitters in one day; the Age of Fast Information was oral as hell.

"Had it for *lunch,*" I said raspily, doing what I hoped was a creditable imitation of the imp. "Let *go.*"

"Heya, don't pass *me* up. Simulated God can't compare to the awareness you get from a nice dose of paranoia. It's like coming up from underwater, you won't believe how awake and alive you'll feel—"

"If you don't let go of my arm, I'll kill you."

"See? *See?*" He puffed out a few more stars. "You're halfway there already. And the price is right. Ask anyone, they'll tell you Crazy Al deals the best paranoia at the price, the best you can get without going totally *in*-sane!"

I twisted away from him. When he reached for me again, I had one of the steel-pointed combs in my hand.

"Heya, *okay!*" He jumped back, raising his arms and deflecting a few stars flying out of his mouth. "Numb your mind with truth and simulated God, that's fine. But you'll be looking for me when *They* all start plotting against you."

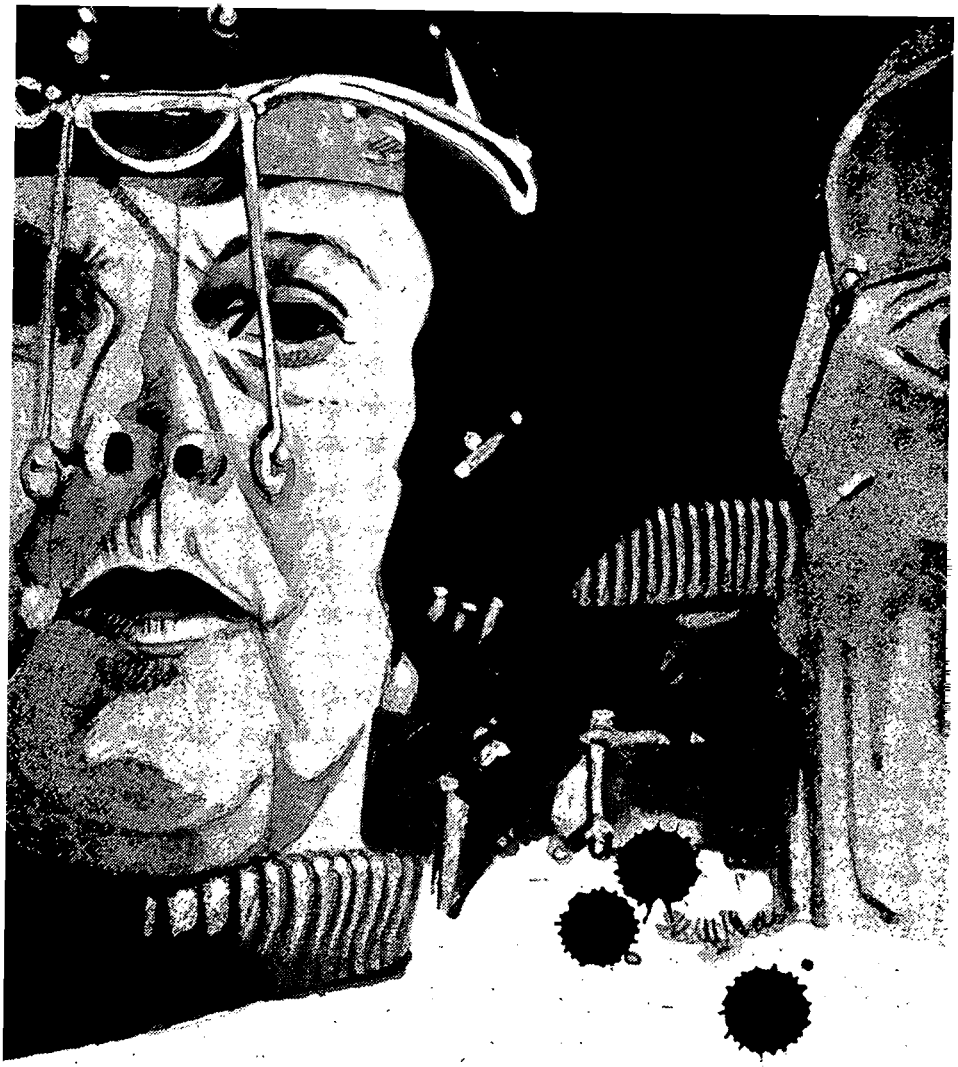
"When *They* all start plotting against me, I *won't* need *you.*" I made a swipe at him and he jumped back again. If there's anything I hate, it's a cheap persecution complex masquerading as paranoia.

The waiting room of Sojourn For Truth was empty and untended. No chairs, no waiting. Sojourn For Truth was the first of the informant addresses I'd been given and they tended to go in descending order of usefulness. It didn't look familiar to me; apparently this was a byte parked with the imp's program.

I felt a little reluctant to bring her up but whatever was on the other side of the twinkly curtain that divided the waiting room from the parlor itself wasn't something I was supposed to handle. Running a short breathing relaxation exercise, I planted a few false memories to give her some context and made the dive as I walked through the curtain.

Some trip parlor. A lot of shabby futons spread on the floor under strings of paper lanterns. The lanterns are supposed to be mood-lighting—how cheap-assed could you get? The even cheaper sound system was playing Brahms in raga-time on sitar, crackling

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard on the high notes. Yah, not God but an incredible simulation. See God in a place like this, you *know* it's hard times for the universe.

There's one paying fool, a young guy lying on a futon near a corner, giggling at the wall where this skinny hype-head in a white gown is making shadow pictures with his hands in front of a bare light-tube. Guess there wasn't too much call for simulated God these days. I wasn't exactly looking to sanctify myself, either. The hype-head caught me staring and shrugged.

"Holo's broken," he says. "They keep telling us the parts'll be in any day now. Big deal. It's the drug that counts, anyway. We got plenty of drug."

I jerk my chin at the wall. "Do God."

"Do *this.*" He gives me the International Symbol of Disdain, which doesn't make the most interesting shadow on the wall. But it keeps the fool on the futon giggling.

Well, nobody ever booked Coney Loe on the extreme cleverness charge. He was just your basic hype-head. They say he'd been some kind of catalyzer-imagist once, the kind creative artists hire to give them head-pictures; supposed to give them a jump-start, seeing all kinds of weird shit in their heads, make them more creative or something. Can't make that stick, myself. I see the weirdest shit in the world in my head and I got no urge to paint *Moby's Dick* or whatever it is. But maybe it's different when Coney Loe does it.

Or did it. Old Coney's neurons gave out early on him and he dried up. Now he's just a hype-head making like some hotwire and this is his latest two-step for groceries.

"So, how's the simulated God here, Coney? Ever try it?"

My calling him by name gives him pause, but just a very little one, and I don't think he doesn't really remember me. Coney liked to forget certain things, keep the bank open for more important information. It was a Thing with him, information, like he was trying to know everything in the world or something. He could have gone pro, and every so often the Brain Police would come snuffling around, waving money in front of him, but they couldn't turn him over. They didn't seem to understand how it was with him, that he had to have information the way some people had to have sex, or memories, and the only way to buy from him was to pay in kind. But catch the Brain Police giving out information—sure, the night I remember getting crowned Pope. Firsthand.

The Brain Police—the whole scene snaps back on me like bad karma. Shit, what have they done to me now? I can't remember the interrogation but you never *can*, unless they find out something from you. I never could figure what gave them the right to take a memory,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

even a bad one like that, and you ask an eagle and all you get is a lot of lawyer ramadoola about confidentiality and your own protection. Like the Brain Police ever protected me from anything.

Coney is staring at me. "You looking for truth?" he says. "Or just keeping a secret?"

"Information," I tell him, automatically. "And maybe I'm keeping a secret." Which I know I am, and it'll come to me in a second . . . something to do with why the Brain Police jerked my chain in the first place. It's on the tip of my brain.

Coney makes a two-handed bird and flaps the wings. "We got truth and God here. Hallucinogens flavored and unflavored, scented, unscented, in your mouth, up your arm, or up wha*tever*, lights, colors—" he changes the bird into a rabbit. "Pictures. What's your pleasure?"

"Information. Like I said." I pull my fingers out of my mouth and wiggle them in front of the light tube, enchanting the paying fool.

Coney bats my hand away. "Truth is cheap. Information costs. Can you afford information? Or only truth?"

Now, I've got money and I've got a secret, and I know which one Coney really wants. Maybe I should have stopped off at a memory lane for a recall booster—

And then it comes to me, just like that, as if someone put a tube in my ear and poured it in like clover honey. "I know something you don't know."

It's like telling a ramrod he's got a limp plaything. Coney frowns and the rabbit becomes plain old fingers without making any difference to the guy on the futon.

"So?" Coney says, a little testy.

"So I like memories. Anybody's but mine. The *real* stuff. Somebody else's. Like I could *be* somebody else. I like that a *lot.*"

"I can understand that." Coney keeps staring at me and does a dog one-handed, which sets his paying fool barking. "That doesn't exactly make it as a secret, little queenie. Anyone could figure it out on short acquaintance. Unless you're holding something other than your own personal disclosure, maybe you want to shake it to the memory lane across the street and stop bothering me when I'm simulating God. What do I care about your memory jones?"

"*You'd* know where to get the really *good* stuff, Coney. You *always* know. Why, you'd even know where the freshest stuff would be. The freshest, never-been-seen stuff, even if no one had told you it was even there yet." I take a breath, grinning because I know I got his attention now; I can tell by the way he's making rabbit shadows

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like it's his sacred mission in life. "Even if it wasn't *supposed* to be there."

"I heard you," he says, and his ruff is way up. Something happened and nobody told him about it; asses will be kicked. I feel sorry for the paying fool, whose ass happens to be handiest. My ass is safe for the moment, because I've got a secret.

"*I* didn't hear *you*," I say. "Am I deaf?"

He's dying because I won't come across. "I might know where you could get an order to go. Or I might have no idea." He keeps doing the rabbit shadow. "Your turn."

"Somebody got sucked." I put a finger to my head and make like I'm thinking real hard. "Somebody that does something fancy. Yah, an actor: Just this morning, can you buy that?"

He can. "Monkey shock," he says. "Your turn."

"The Monkey Shop?"

"I *said*, your *turn*." He means it, no appeal. Either I come up with a name he can check or he'll kick my ass after all for a liar. Information junkies have some interesting ways of kicking your ass, nothing you want to beg for.

"Sovay. That's the name, ask anybody." Even I winced at that one. But hell, you just can't resist stinging an information junkie when you got the chance. They all act like knowing all that shit makes them more than the hype-heads they really are.

"Shock. *Shock.* Monkey *shock.* Open your goddam ears."

"Do a monkey!" chortles the fool.

"Shut up," Coney tells him, but somehow he produces an apelike shadow.

"So what's a monkey shock?"

"Thrills."

"A *thrillseeker?* Screw *that.* I already *know* how to get *excited*, thank *you* for *nothing.*"

"This is different. Potluck. You go in and hope for the best. Lots of juice. Makes you dance like a monkey. But if you pay them enough—" Big pause. "Your turn."

Great. I had to go and shoot it all. I could have held back that it was this morning, I could have given an address first instead of a name—shit, an information junkie'll finesse you every time. I'm trying to think fast; do I make something up and hope he doesn't find out too soon it's a lie, or go for the brass. Brass first, until I can come up with a convincing lie that could pass for misinformation later.

"*My* turn? Like hell, you ain't finished taking your turn, you're changing dicks in the middle of my screw."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Coney won't thaw. "Your turn." He gives me a little smile, making a rooster on the wall. The skinny shit knows I'm tapped, or he thinks he knows it. I'm wondering what the odds are that I could beat it out of him and then I realize he's told me enough that I can figure out the rest myself. He couldn't help it; the only thing as good for an information junkie as finding something out is passing it on.

"Okay, here's my turn. You say *potluck?* You say *juice?* You say *pay enough? I* say it sounds like maybe there's a little extra in the juice if you pay enough and by the time your head stops jitter-bugging, who's to say whatever you got wasn't yours to begin with."

Sometimes I really surprise myself. I may be a hype-head, but I ain't no burn-out, no sclerosis this year. Coney looks like he bit down on something sour.

"Guess you know it all," he says.

I'm smirking away. "And if I don't know, I know who knows."

"Yah?" He smirks back. "But do you know *how* you know all this?"

"Just living right." But I get a little edgy creep. I know about Sovay from the Brain Police, that's nothing; every time someone gets sucked, they round up the usual suspects, no big shit and so fucking what. But I know that's not what he means.

"Like, how'd you get so genius, figuring stuff out like you got a sherlock circuit." His smile is mean. "Don't come back, little queenie. I don't know who you are and you don't, either."

"I'm *everyone!*" Coney's fool announces at the top of his lungs. Coney puts a polka-dotted sleeve over the tube and gives it a spin. While the fool is going cross-eyed over this, he's rummaging around in some stuff on the floor and finds a long white beard to put on. Icons die hard.

He pauses to glare at me. "'Don't come back' means you're leaving now. Or can't you figure that part out?"

I give him a salute and start backing toward the exit.

Coney leans over the fool. "Hi, I'm God. What's on your mind?"

The fool stares up at him; every neuron must be flapping and snapping like tiny pennants in a hurricane. "Why am I here?"

"Because you're *stupid.*"

Fool nods very slowly. "Ah. I always thought it was more complicated than that."

It's mean, but that's the nature of truth.

I shut her down as I went back through the curtain into the empty waiting room. The combined physical and mental movement gave me a moment of light vertigo while the memory of the immediate past settled around me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Memory from an imp feels more like a dream, and this felt like a dream I'd had before. I looked back at the curtain. Coney Loe; I didn't know him, but the imp did, which meant he was a double-blind informant—only imps contacted him, and when the Sovay case was closed, I wouldn't know him any more, unless he somehow slipped into my long-term memory. That can happen after repeated contact with a double-blind.

I put him out of my mind and considered Monkey Shock as I stepped outside. My pal the neurosis peddler was still hawking paranoia out front. He gave me a wide berth. I ignored him. Monkey Shock wouldn't be anything more than crude convulsions induced by plain old electricity, with timed-release hallucinogens and a mental sorter delivering extra jolts randomly through the right hemisphere. Messy, but not illegal.

It wouldn't be hard to add sucker leftovers to the mental sorter. Memories would work best. The customer would get a thrill at each jolt. Afterwards, electroshock amnesia covered all the traces. As the imp said, after your brain stopped jitterbugging, it would be impossible to tell which memories had been added and which were native. Maybe even the customer wouldn't know for sure. Ingenious, and a lot less obvious than taking the stock to a memory lane or a crib.

Bad news for me, though. Monkey Shock wasn't one of those things I could engage in with even marginal safety. Getting myself hooked up in one of the sleazy memory lanes to see if there was anything of Sovay in the merchandise they were offering was safer than, say, getting myself hooked up to someone who'd been to the lane and bought some of it. In a lane, I'd just have been hooked up to a machine and a machine doesn't know the difference between a real memory junkie and a brain police officer with a memory junkie overlay.

But the worse news was Coney Loe's suspicion. It could have been mere pique because some little unwashed hype-head he considered beneath him actually had some information he didn't have. Or else I really had burned myself in a blazing display of deductive thinking. Blazing for the imp, anyway, or what she was supposed to be. The imp didn't have all my information but she did have my intelligence, and maybe that wasn't quite in character . . . although showing it off would be.

In any case, I was going to have to track down Monkey Shock before Coney Loe could get around to alerting them about me. *I don't know who you are and you don't, either.*

Two onionheads shackled together on a long chain went by, both giving me dirty looks. I ignored them showily, turning away but being careful to keep their retreating figures in my peripheral vision so I'd see if they decided to turn on me and accuse me of flirting with one of them. Onionheads in a jealous frenzy could be fatal.

The neurosis peddler edged toward me, keeping out of reach. "Heya,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm not trying to bother you or anything, but I got this spot staked, I got permits."

I moved off without looking at him, bumping into a skinny blonde who seemed to be in the process of coming to while walking. She barely noticed me in her rediscovery of reality. Well, *this* reality.

"Heya, lover." The woman had flies in her eyes. They looked real, preserved in the thickened irises, the pupils camouflaged in the little fly bodies. I was squatting in a parking space directly in front of The Zoot Mill, watching both the holo display on the sidewalk and the voice-only phone across the street, in case Sovay/Moon decided to make a return appearance. Probably what I should have done in the first place, instead of burning myself with Coney Loe. The Zoot Mill holo was a little ragged, and nothing special—dancing girls, dancing boys, banquets, money tornadoes, and a lot of the usual signs and wonders—but it was tankless and vivid.

"*Heya,* lover," Fly Eyes said again, moving a little closer.

"*What,*" I snapped.

"You look like it's been a while." She grinned, showing me another fly design etched on a front tooth. Mouths, I thought. The world was full of *mouths*. "Well, the drought's over because I got the man of your dreams." She saw me looking at The Zoot Mill's display where Hercules or someone like him was ceremoniously disrobing for three holo slave girls and one live woman who looked too fried to really appreciate it.

"*Better* than *that,*" she said. "Much better. Like he invented it. Unforgettable. It'll be keeping you warm when you're ninety."

Looking at her, I had a flash. It was like looking out of two eyes belonging to two different people. For a moment, the imp was aware in a vague way and we were cohabiting. This was the type of situation more suited for her than for me. I put her to sleep again, but the fingers of my right hand went straight to my mouth. "Go *away,*" I said. "I don't want some secondhand wet dream."

" 'Wet dream'? That doesn't even begin to describe it. This is the mystical experience, altered state of consciousness. Ever been in a state of grace for three hours straight? If you had, you wouldn't be squatting here biting your nails."

I trapped both hands between my knees. "A wet dream's a wet dream. If this guy really burns, I'd rather press his flesh myself."

"Not possible, he's far away. But I remember it like it was an hour ago, had the whole memory specially enhanced and amplified. You'll taste him, you'll smell him—" She babbled on but she wasn't fooling me. What she probably had was a second- or thirdhand memory of someone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

else's fantasy. I guess I must have looked like I'd spent the last ten years locked in a lunchbox.

"Come on," she said, moving a little closer. "It's the best kind of mind-fuck you'll ever get. You don't like it, I'll give you a rebate minus the equipment fee."

"Rebate *this*. Now skin off—" I pulled my left hand away from my mouth "—and leave me *alone*."

"Frigid," she jeered and stalked off.

I looked up at the meter. Five more minutes and then I'd have to move along. Meterfeeding had lately been outlawed in the Downs, one of the few regulations successfully enforced. A metertender had already come by once to take my picture so I was going to have to decide what to do—start asking around for Fortray, Anwar, or Easterman, go to the next informant address as Marya, or hang around here as either Marya or myself pretending to be Marya but keeping a low profile. Asking around for someone could get sticky. I could have given at least one of the names to Marya to ask Coney Loe about, but all things considered, it probably would have made him even more suspicious. He might have ended up stampeding the suckers into closing down shop and flushing Sovay altogether.

I kept thinking that Sovay/Moon couldn't have gone far in the state he was in, which would also possibly mean he hadn't gone far in the first place, choosing the first phone he saw after coming out of Monkey Shock. Therefore, I could have been in Monkey Shock's locale—for all I knew, it was a back room in The Zoot Mill, something I might have been able to find out if Marya hadn't insisted on antagonizing Coney Loe.

The meter was just about expired when I saw her coming stiffly down the sidewalk toward me. For several seconds, I froze until I remembered she couldn't possibly recognize me. Certainly she wasn't hunting for me or any other kind of police. She looked tense and scared and a lot more emotional than she had back in her kitchen when she'd told me it wouldn't make any difference to her personally if we caught the suckers who had done Sovay.

No points for nerve, I decided; it wasn't *nerve* she was demonstrating by coming into the Downs. I had no idea what she thought she was doing, but even more to the point, how the hell could she know enough to do it in the first place?

Stupid fool, I said to myself. Any time someone gets sucked, you look at the spouse first, no matter what; if the victim's married to Baby Jesus, he's number one on the list of suspects and you put the little tyke under surveillance—

But she *was* under surveillance. *I* was watching her, wasn't I, she was right there in front of me. The regular police had probably tagged her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the way into my vicinity and then left her for me to deal with—they always know when a case officer is working an investigation, even if they don't know exactly who it is. If Rowan knew anything, she'd take me right to the place I wanted to go, and if she didn't, I could get rid of her somehow, chase her out under some pretext or another.

It was getting late and the streets were starting to fill with what they call local color, hues that look best under artificial light. Rowan hadn't made any effort to blend in. She was still in her pouch suit, which was too new and too expensive for the area. Just as she drew even with The Zoot Mill, I saw the twinkle of a paranoid's badge on her sleeve. All jumped up on a paranoid rush for a trip to the Downs?

The parking meter chimed and I stood up slowly, not wanting to alarm her, but she wasn't paying any attention to me. She only had eyes for the holo.

It was still Hercules or someone like him, wearing a strap and doing a vigorous ballet/square dance with the slave girls. Rowan was watching with an intentness that could have passed for carnal, which wouldn't have been so unusual. Everyone handles a loss differently. But then I saw she was trying to get a good look at Hercules' face, as though he might have been someone she knew.

That idea was unappetizing. How would she know some cheap holo hoochy-koocher and why would she be looking for him now? And why had she had to get paranoid to do it? She had no record of being licensed for paranoia or any other psychosis. And how paranoid *was* she, anyway?

I moved carefully around the other side of the holo, maneuvering through the small crowd that was gathering to watch Hercules. He was looping through his strip routine again and I found myself giving him a few points for talent. After all, who ever started *out* with the idea of being a cheap holo hoochy-koocher anyway? In his mind, maybe this had been *Afternoon of a Faun,* updated.

And what was it in Rowan's mind?

Her attention remained focused on him, enabling me to get around on her left side, so she'd have to go right past me to get into The Zoot Mill, if that was where she was going.

Inadvertently, I brushed against a rooster-boy with a multicolored crest and feathered codpiece, and not much else except for a dusting of gold powder on his pasty skin. He turned to me with a wide, automatic grin.

"Hot enough for you?" The low, throaty come-on was already out of his mouth when the grin froze into something more painful than sexy. Rooster-boys weren't supposed to be picky but apparently this one was. The rainbow crest rising from his hairline actually drooped a little. "Forget it. Not even if I was flatline."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And when have *I* ever demanded anything from *you*, dickiebird?"

He blinked at me and I winced. Not crude enough for the situation or the character I was supposed to be. Trying too hard; either I had to let Marya come up or limit my vocabulary to *Heya* and *Fuck off* while I was driving.

And then Rowan turned around and looked directly at me. I froze again, in spite of the fact that I knew she couldn't have recognized my scratchy, gargly voice. The paranoid's badge on her sleeve glittered and I realized she was just generally anxious. That was her "paranoia"—not the real thing with delusions of grandeur and hallucinations but the street stuff neurosis peddlers like my pal in front of Sojourn For Truth sold to the public: persecution complexes, anxiety, and such. I wouldn't have thought anyone like Rowan would have had to buy anxiety to walk around in the Downs. She could have breathed it in with the air.

A pimp came up on her other side and tapped her on the shoulder. She jumped, twisting around and back into my rooster boy, who immediately put both hands possessively on her shoulders. She jerked away from him and stepped into the holo display. Hercules' arm went through her neck and I thought she was going to have hysterics. The pimp pulled her out of the circle of reception before she could break up the display. The two of them struggled together and then he said something I didn't catch because the rooster-boy was bitching to nobody in particular that his customer had been stolen. People began giving ground around him, allowing me to move closer to Rowan, who was listening to the pimp with an expression that didn't look the least paranoid anymore, or even anxious. She and the pimp made an odd couple, her in the expensive, trendy pouch suit and him in his traditional garish technicolor fuzz. He pointed down the street away from me and she made a move to leave. Blocking her with a fuzzy, electric-green arm, he tapped her paranoid's badge. Rowan shook her head.

I maneuvered around behind them, planting more false memories for Marya, leaving her the knowledge of who Rowan was. If she thought Rowan was leading her to Monkey Shock, she'd be happy to follow.

Abruptly, Rowan slapped some currency into the pimp's hand and stalked off in the direction he'd pointed. The pimp laughed at her retreating back and turned to the display again, watching Hercules fiddle with the ties on his codpiece. I let Rowan go half a block before sending Marya after her.

She looks like she knows where she's going but not what she's doing. People like her, they never know what they're doing but they always know where they're going.

I *know* she's on her way to Monkey Shock; either she's leading

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Brain Police straight to them, or she's going to ask for a rake-off of the profits on Sovay, grieving widow and all that shit. I've seen that before. Or, hell, she might even believe she can get him back. Plenty of them believe that; fuck if I know why. But then, astrologers are still in business, too, and there was one guy I know of personally who probably believes he met God today and God told him he was here because he was stupid, which just goes to show you faith gets it over information every time. Faith, or maybe truth, depending on your point of view, which is everything in this game.

So what the hell, maybe they'll pay her off, or just suck her and call it a bonus. Either way, there'd be something for me when the dust settled.

She goes two blocks before she starts slowing down and looking at the buildings. There's not much here, a pawn shop, a hardware/software dealer and a crib passing as a read-only room. She almost passes the crib and then stops.

Now, I know this crib and if it's Monkey Shock, I remember my papal coronation. Pimp's probably going to run her all over the Downs, I realize; tells her to go one place and when she gets there, someone'll tell her to go somewhere else, and so on, and so on, till she's all turned around and lost. Then maybe they'll send her to Monkey Shock, when they're sure she's too confused to know where she is. And when they're sure she isn't wagging a tail behind her.

Well, I'd just say the pimp sent me, too, to keep an eye on her. Why not.

I go right in after her and she doesn't even know it. Place is just a big ratmaze inside, cubicles and low walls, so I can keep track of her from a distance. They're doing a little business in there anyway, not much, but a few other hype-heads are wandering the aisles. The whole idea is, you see something in a cubicle you like, you step in and have some.

Rowan's all at sea in here. I cruise the other side of the room, just in case there's anything interesting running, but it's like any other crib—one sorry soul after another, waiting to sell you their best shot, and the hardware piled up off to one side. One old gock with peppermint eyes (where do they come up with this stuff?) and foil curls is whispering "Cubs? Cubs? You like 'em young? It's no crime to just *think* about it, you know," and next to him is a job in a leather hood with the eyes zipped shut, chanting, "Fetish, fetish, fetish," like I'm supposed to believe I can really get one that'll stick past the first time I go to sleep. And I'm watching Rowan and wondering what she's making of all this; I'm sure she's never been in a crib before.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And I don't know what gets into me all of a sudden, but I want to get over to her and tell her to get out. She can think about anything she wants with anybody she wants, but a place like this is below anyone still capable of raising a sine wave without help. Hell, even the hardware has to be scuzzy, with all that kind of thinking running through it; I bet if I go over and crack open the system next to the gock with the peppermint eyes, it'll be nothing but slime inside instead of chips and plates. Marya Anderik, crusader for social reform, sure. For all I know, I bought from the old gock before he ran thin enough to move in here.

Then Rowan stops in front of a cubicle and Hercules pops up, live, Hercules the hoochy-koocher in cheap jumpjohns. And what happens next is so kinky, even *I* don't believe it.

They slam together and start *kissing*.

Automatically, I duck, waiting for alarms to go off and vice squads to drop down from the ceiling. The regular police love to raid a meat market with people really *doing* things instead of just thinking about them. But then Rowan and Hercules sink down before anyone else gets a look at what they're doing. I give them five seconds and then hurry over, going as fast as I can because I have to run up and down two aisles going almost the width of the room.

When I get to them, I expect to see live porno, but it's weirder than that—they're already lying side by side on the cots, and they're hooked into the hardware, her eyes in a tank on one side and his in a tank on the other, just like everything is normal.

What's wrong with this picture is there's a third person, a funny-looking haunt in ratatat worse than mine, lying on the floor between them, and *he's* hooked in, too, through an illegal auxiliary connection. His eyes are drifting around in a bowl next to his head and for some reason, I think of that old joke—the party was so wild, I passed out and woke up as the guy next to me. The crib's not licensed for anything other than one-on-one. No crib is. I can't figure why they're risking it; anyone in here can be a Brain Police plant and if they're caught, it's instant raid. But people who mouth-kiss'll try *anything*. Mouths, *yuck*.

The guy on the floor suddenly reaches up and starts to disconnect, and the last thing I see before I do a fast fade is he's got tattooed hands. Christ, the silly stuff you notice.

I had sixty seconds, give or take, to decide whether I should confront them or skin off and maintain surveillance at a distance. The guy on the floor; now fumbling like a novice with the connections to his optic nerves, was obviously the man who called me at the station—the tattoo on his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right hand fit the description he gave. If his memory wasn't too spotty, he would recognize me as the person who was supposed to meet him at the phone across from The Zoot Mill. I wasn't so sure making contact now would be the optimum thing to do.

He had his connections out and he was reaching for his eyes. I ducked into the next cubicle, and crouched next to the wall. The occupants didn't care—they were both hooked up to a system, sharing whatever it was people shared in cribs. Next door, I could hear Sovay/Moon moving around, helping Rowan and Hercules disconnect.

"Oh, thank you," Rowan whispered politely, as though he'd just passed her the edible polyester at a dinner party. There were a few sounds of hurried kisses and then I heard Hercules whisper, "Rowan and I will go out together. Give us ten minutes to get past my pimp—we don't want him cutting himself in. Then meet us at—"

I couldn't get it because Sovay/Moon chose that moment to grunt unhappily. He started to make some kind of complaint but the other two shushed him. A moment later, they hurried past the cubicle I was crouching in, leaving Sovay/Moon alone. I gave it five seconds and then crawled out of the cubicle and into the other.

He was sitting on the edge of Rowan's cot with his face in his hands; I could see he was trembling a little. Who was he now—Sovay/Moon, or the man who had bought Sovay/Moon? Only one way to find out for certain and, since I had probable cause to believe he was a receiver of sucked goods, I could legally search his mind without a warrant.

Getting him to hold still for that, however, was another matter. I was beginning to wish I'd taken the stinger after all. On the other hand, if Sovay/Moon was still dominant, I might be able to talk him into cooperating and keeping his mouth shut afterwards.

Sensing something, he lowered his hands and saw me squatting at the entrance to the cubicle. He didn't look a thing like Sovay's description of the character—long horse-face, uneven lank brown hair, too much nose and mouth. He could have passed for my brother, the way I looked now. My brother or my father. That gave me an idea.

He started to get up and I said, "No, it's me—your daughter."

Several expressions swept down his long face as he plumped down on the cot again and shoved himself away from me, packing himself into a corner of the cubicle.

"Don't you see, Father," I said, crawling toward him. "It must go on. We can't let it die with you, because—" I floundered for a moment. Christ, but I wished I had a lot more background than what he'd told me. "—because I'll be carrying it on, and from me, it will go to my own child, and so on until we come to the . . . the final shore and we'll all be there to see it together—"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Final peak."

I froze. "Uh . . . what?"

" 'Till we come to the final peak and see the world as we made it spread out before us.' Improv doesn't mean you can change the analogy." Watching my face, he untensed about a millimeter.

"Oh." I slid up onto the cot and sat facing him.

"Well, go on," he said. "Talk me into it."

"Talk you into it?"

He looked briefly at the ceiling. "You're supposed to persuade me to let you archive my personal memories as the symbol of the torch passing. Reach for it, pull out all the stops, you can clean up the scenery-chewing later for performance. Don't be afraid of the Method. Make me see that my memories are as important to you as they are to me, show me I can't be selfish enough to let a dynasty die with me."

I started to flash again and Marya stirred more actively than she had back on the street with Fly Eyes. It would figure, her being a memory junkie. She submerged easily enough after a moment, but as my perspective cleared, I saw that Sovay/Moon was looking a little bleary. I had to talk him into remaining dominant before he realized I wasn't an actress and this wasn't a rehearsal booth. And before the real identity of this hype-head asserted itself.

"You gave me life," I said desperately, remembering what Flaxie had said about all the neurotics in theatre. "Let me do the same for you, let me preserve yours and all the lives you preserve."

"Not bad." He relaxed a little more and favored me with an approving nod. "Keep going."

"Um . . . flesh of my flesh and thought of my thoughts?"

Now he looked stern. "Are you asking me or telling me?"

"We shouldn't argue, Father," I said, getting impatient. "It's right and you know it's right. We chose to maintain ourselves in living minds, not a machine. It's my turn, Father, it's my birthright. If you deny it to me, you might as well kill me, too."

"Brava." He gave me a raised fist salute and lay down on the cot. "From here, we can just mime the actions in detail—you *have* had mime training, haven't—"

But that was all I needed. I leaped on him and sat on his chest, pressing one hand down on his throat.

"What—wait a—"

"The Method," I said, grabbing the connections with my other hand. "All the way. You just told me not to be afraid of the Method."

He sighed. "All right. But let's do it quick—"

I popped his left eye out and sent the connection in, hoping the disinfect cycle on the hardware was functional. He went completely limp under

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me, which made removing the right eye easier. Climbing off him, I set the system for a full cycle and did some deep breathing while I watched him lying on the cot with the wires running out from under his flattened eyelids. This system wouldn't have a lot of the automatic blocks and shields dividing two minds in contact; I was going to have to draw on my own resources for those.

I pulled the other cot closer and lay down, clutching the other set of connections. He was going to be late meeting Rowan and Hercules; if I could work fast enough, we'd be disconnected by the time they thought to come back and see what was keeping him.

It was too bad, I thought as I worked my eyes out one at a time, that I couldn't have had Flaxie with me. I wasn't as steady as I'd been back at the station.

It was a real bare-bones system, no compartmentalization, no waiting space—you were either in contact or not. Sovay/Moon manifested immediately, facing me across the mental environment of a theatrical stage. It didn't have perfect definition—the floor was flimsy and the prop furniture was transparent and runny, but there was a hard white spotlight on Sovay/Moon, illuminating him without a bit of vagueness. He looked exactly as he had when I'd seen his body, minus the orange color, with long black hair. The jade eyes were glowing holes in his face.

Don't look at the audience, he said. *It's unprofessional to break proscenium.*

Apparently he was referring to the cavernous dark area gaping on my left. I didn't look but I got the undeniable feeling someone was out there watching—it had to be the guy who had bought from the suckers.

Now, let's try the improv again, Sovay/Moon said, *and this time, really work on convincing me. And remember the feeling when we return to the script.*

Sovay. I moved toward him. *I'm the person you talked—*

Dammitall! He shook both fists at the ceiling, which was as shadowy and vague as the audience area. *How do you expect me to rehearse with you when you keep breaking character?* He lowered his arms and took a deep breath, composing himself. *You don't know the lines you're supposed to be paraphrasing, do you?*

Um . . . no.

A script materialized in his left hand. He beckoned to me. *All right, then, come refresh your memory and then we'll go on with the scene.*

Instantly, I was standing in the spotlight with him. He turned me so that my back was to the audience and opened the script, pointing to the top of a page. *From here,* he ordered. *Memorize this.*

At the top of the page it said:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DENNIE MOON

I must remain in character in order to remain dominant. We can communicate this way for only a short time. Explain who you are, answer in here if you can. If you can't, get out immediately.

I concentrated; words melted into existence in the blank space below.

MERSINE MOON

I'm the officer you called earlier. How were you able to break character and call?

Sovay glanced at me and then looked back at the script.

DENNIE MOON

I wasn't quite so settled in at the time. He's getting more of a hold on me but so far I've managed to convince him I'm not done rehearsing. He's not very smart.

MERSINE MOON

How do you know Rowan and the stripper?

Sovay blew out a disgusted breath.

DENNIE MOON

[blows out disgusted breath] Rowan's my wife, of course. The stripper found me—or him, rather. The stripper's another customer. He bought one of my characters. I called the Brain Police, but he called Rowan.

MERSINE MOON

Which character is he?

DENNIE MOON

Dionysius, from *The Zeus Revue*. It's a character that allows for more of the actor's personality as a performer. He—*I* rehearsed that one a lot with Rowan.

MERSINE MOON

Why were you hooked in with Rowan and the stripper? Where are you supposed to meet them, and why? What's going on, is she involved with the suckers?

The stage gave a long shudder. I could sense pressure building up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somewhere behind me. *Take a last look!* Sovay/Moon said. *If you don't have it by now, you never will!*

DENNIE MOON

Rowan is coll

The stage rumbled under us. He snapped the script shut and tossed it away. It vanished before it hit the floor. *Time's up,* he said, glancing significantly over his shoulder. *Next time you audition, be more familiar with your material. Endit!*

Like that, we were out of contact. I had the sensation of movement somewhere nearby and I disconnected, rushing to pop my eyes back in. All I had to do was arrest him and get him back to the station where they'd pull the whole story out of him.

I had the right eye in when I saw them, Rowan and the stripper on either side of him, helping him up from the cot. The stripper turned to me as I jammed my left eye into the socket, but the connection missed on the first try. Sovay/Moon pointed at me and the stripper disappeared into my blind side. I managed to make the connection in time to see Hercules coming at me with his hand raised. Metal flashed in his palm.

The first thing I think is, oh, no, I put my eyes in upside-down. Then I can feel how I'm lying with my head hanging off the edge of whatever this is and I think, oh, shit, I had a seizure.

And then I remember Coney Loe and Monkey Shock, and I think, oh, great, I found the place, I must have got something. And there's that smell of fried hair and I know for sure I've been Monkey Shocked and the goddam lowlifes didn't even let me take my combs out. I'm lucky I didn't get my fucking head burned off.

Moving slow, I roll over and there I am hanging on the edge of a cheap cot in what I know is a crib. My eyes aren't right, feels like they're looking in slightly different directions, and I got a headache they call a headquake, and I don't remember anything. And I hit the floor.

I climb up on the cot again and lie there trying to make my eyes go right. They sort of resettle while a little something comes back to me; I can remember coming to the crib, and I remember some people in a three-way—something about *mouth-kissing,* which my stomach is just not in favor of me thinking about at the moment—but after that, the screen's dark.

They must have told me how to find Monkey Shock, those three kinkos, and I must have gone there. Electroshock amnesia'll get you every time. Nice bunch, Monkey Shock, dumping me back at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crib. It's hanging onto its license by its teeth, they wouldn't touch a cop shop. Most cribs won't, they're too likely to be raided.

I try sitting up and I feel a little better. At least my head doesn't drop off and roll away. But how long, I wonder, am I going to have to put up with electroshock amnesia? I mean, what's the good of getting a memory if you can't remember it? Shit, I'm going to have to start living right, I tell myself, and then I feel it, stirring around somewhere in some vague area of my mind.

I can't believe this. They sucked a Brain Policer and palmed some of her off on me. Out-fucking-*rageous!* I couldn't have gone there for *that*—

Sovay, right. Now I remember. I wanted a piece of Sovay and instead I get some nobody from the goddam cops, of all the shitty things. How the hell—

Coney Loe. The mindfucking hype-head got to them before I did. That's got to be it. Coney Loe got to Monkey Shock and they decided to have a little fun with me, they put the goddam mark of the snitch on me.

I stand up and find out that's not the best idea I've had. Leaning on the system, I wait for the world to stop rocking back and forth, and something else pops into my mind, a memory of Hercules coming at me with what seems to be a joybuzzer. Hercules? Right, a stripper. But the image doesn't jive with what I remember about finding him and the other two in the crib together.

It's one of *her* memories, the cop's. Got to be. So Hercules must be in on it and he got the cop for them.

If there's anything I know for sure right now, it's that I do not want any part of this cop. All I need is to get rounded up again and have the Brain Police find her. Instant hard time, they won't care how she got there. Another thing I know is, nobody's going to dump her for me, nobody's going to touch me. If I want to get rid of her, I'm going to have to find Monkey Shock again and make a deal.

Right. This time they *will* burn my head off.

Unless I can get Coney Loe to stand up for me.

Shit, I think, it just gets worse. Coney Loe'll hold me *down* while they burn my head off. Unless I've got something I can hold *him* down with . . .

Thinking is like trying to sprint through corn syrup. The cop doesn't seem to know anything about Coney, she's no help. I get vague pictures of her on a stage with somebody, like she's an actor, too, which makes no damned sense.

On the other hand, *Coney Loe* won't know she doesn't know anything about him. Things start coming together for me. I can run a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ramadoola about how she got his name and planted a time-bomb—as soon as the electroshock amnesia wears off, I'll be compelled to turn myself in and spill everything, so either he gets his friends to suck her out of me or we all go together when we go.

Only . . . wouldn't they just go ahead and suck me dry?

Okay. I modify my story for Coney. I got a friend waiting for me, a rooster-boy, I'll say. If I don't show up intact, I'll say, rooster-boy makes the call. After all, rooster-boys got nothing to fear from the Brain Police, just the vice squad.

Good for me. Maybe getting Monkey Shocked blew out a lot of old junk and actually made me smarter. I make a move to walk and discover I'm not ready for that.

The memory of hitting the floor was as vivid as the real thing. I was going to have a bruise on my face, but it could only help. When you're scared, the best thing you can do is look scary yourself. With a bruise, I might be able to stop a clock without even frowning at it.

I knew right away I wasn't conscious, which was to say, Marya wasn't conscious, though how long I'd/we'd be out was impossible to figure. The zap I'd taken with the joybuzzer had gotten us both, jamming Marya in dominant while I was conscious; I'd come up only when I/she blacked out or went to sleep. If there was a worse arrangement, I was hard-pressed to imagine what it would be, but at least I wasn't panicking about it. The panic button was sound asleep with Marya.

I wasn't so much thinking as I was dreaming lucidly; dreaming is usually what you're doing when a part of your mind is active while you're unconscious, and lucid dreaming gives you an edge, but this state had a few important differences. For one thing, I was more of a dream myself. It wasn't a state I was unfamiliar with, but I'd always been in a controlled situation, plugged into a system getting an imprint or bumping up memory for evidence or testimony in court. It was about the closest thing to an out-of-body experience most of us would ever have—hell, maybe it *was* a bonafide out-of-body experience . . . which gave me the best idea I'd had all day. If I could get Marya into a controlled situation like that, I'd be able to regain dominance, maybe even kick her out by inducing her to migrate.

The problem was, she thought she was real now. Of course, she'd always taken that for granted, but the difference was, she was aware of me as something she thought she'd ingested. I couldn't just plant the truth. Most likely she wouldn't believe it anyway, but if she did, there was no predicting what she might do. Whatever that turned out to be, I wouldn't be dominant so I wouldn't be able to stop her; worse, I wouldn't even be aware of it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Abruptly, my eyes opened and there was some uncountable mental time in which Marya and I were up front simultaneously, seeing in doubled vision. Her puzzlement began to give way to panic; she couldn't place the mental state she was in and it frightened her. Then we both lost ground and I was sliding back into darkness, forcing an intense craving for a memory, hoping it would leave a residue strong enough to make her follow up.

By the time I get to the street, I feel awake enough to function, but my memories are all screwed around again. I know I was going to do something before I went out, but the blow to the head's fogged me in. For once, I'm thinking about how if I had the loot, I'd get a turbo-job, where they fix up the organization of your brain so you can think better. Except that's always been too close to real brain surgery for my taste and you have to get a couple of doctors to approve it anyway. Hype-heads don't go to doctors on free will. Besides, this is just electroshock amnesia and that'll pass. Already I'm remembering better—I got my rooster-boy waiting for me to show up intact for when I lean on Coney Loe to steer me back to Monkey Shock so I can get rid of this cop they dumped on me. The problem is, I can't remember exactly where I left him, over at The Zoot Mill or back in the crib or someplace else entirely, but he's waiting. It'll come to me when I need it, I'm pretty sure on this.

Something I know for certain is, I want to get away from the crib and this is another thing I'm taking up with these Monkey Shock suckers. Dumping me back in a crib like I belonged there with all that head-trash. Hype-heads and head-trash ain't the same, and I feel like making someone real sorry about mixing the two.

But even more, for some reason, I feel like getting a memory for no other why-not than why not. And even I know this is not the right thing to do at the moment, jones or no jones. First I pay a call on Coney Simulated God Loe, then I lose this cop. After that, I can pick up a memory. Can't be any Sovay left at this point, but I think I've had enough of Monkey Shock anyway.

Sojourn For Truth is closed. There's just this skank neurosis peddler out front and as soon as he sees me, he's flinching, like I'm about to swing on him.

"What is it, bank holiday or something?" I ask him, not that I really expect him to know.

He shuffles back two steps and something shiny dribbles down his chin. A star. "Why?"

And all of a sudden, I get this funny feeling I know him, or at least

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I think I've seen him before. Frigging electroshock amnesia. For all I know, I walked past my own mother on the way here and I'm damned if I can remember *her*, either.

"You know God in there?" I say. I'd ask him if he knows me, but I'm not about to let a skank know he's got the advantage.

"I don't believe in God," he says, edging away another step. "If it's all the same to you."

"You're magnum help." I look around, sticking my hands in my pockets. This is the upper northwest quadrant of the Downs, nothing much around. Late as it is, most of the hype-heads have migrated southerly, where the real stuff is. Sojourn For Truth does business mostly with slummers from the rest of the city, tourists and daytrippers.

"My permit goes to midnight," the neurosis peddler says defensively. "You got a problem with that?"

I look at him. "What's your fuck-up, eatin' the profits again? Dipping into your own paranoia?"

Now he moves a step toward me with a suspicious squint. "Don't you know me?"

"If I wanted to know you, I would." I turn to go and he grabs my arm. The touch sets off one of those mental alarm bells and I reach for a comb automatically, without thinking about it.

"Heya, heya!" He jumps back. "No need for it, no need! You *don't* remember me, do you?"

"So what the fuck difference does it make?" I say, getting all brass. "I remember you, I *don't* remember you, big shit."

He's got this big smile on his face now, and shiny little stars flecking his teeth. "Shoulda took the paranoia when I offered. Now look at you. You're a mess. But it ain't too late. Get paranoid now, and it could save your life."

"I don't want paranoia. I want God."

He jerks his head at the place. "God took the day off. Know what God does on downtime?"

"Plays chicken with the devil."

"Good one." He winks, which is too cute. "Come on, little queenie. Have a little paranoia, good for what ails you."

I pop a comb and give him five little wet red beads on the hand reaching for me. He howls and backs off while I trip away, wiping the comb on my shirt.

Now, if I was a Coney Loe, where would I go? If an information junkie knows everything, where does he go to find out? I'm still wiping the comb on my shirt when I feel a funny little crackle from the left-side pocket. I reach in, and find two little pieces of paper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

folded over, and when I open them up, I scan three names typed out on one, all with a U after them, and half a dozen addresses written on the other, starting with Sojourn For Truth.

I wrote something down? *I* can *write?*

Either I'm getting talented in my old age, or Monkey Shock planted this on me when they stuck me with the cop. And on the one hand, I'm thinking I got no reason to think that's how it rolled out, but on the other, I got no better excuse for finding handwriting in my own pocket. The other list, I don't know what to think. I never heard of any of them. They could be cops for all I know, U could stand for Undercover.

Come on, now, Marya, I say to myself, however many of me there are at this moment; let's think a little further. The addresses could be, I am thinking now, Coney Loe's Things-To-Do list, and how I got it I don't know, but it could happen. Or it could be the trail to Monkey Shock—go here, go there, go this place, go that place, one more stop, splash-down, and somebody wrote it down as I went, maybe me. I feel like maybe I can write, not just pound a keyboard. That would make Monkey Shock the last address on the list, so all I have to do is go there.

Or—I'm thinking real hard now, and I feel so genius I begin to wonder if it's the cop in me and maybe I don't want to unload her so fast after all—or this is the cop's list planted on me after all, but it's all snitch-stops. The names are snitches.

The more I think this, the more I get this strong feeling I'm online. Snitch-stops and snitch names. That would make real sense. So I decide I'll take them in order. Sojourn For Truth's out; the address under that is six blocks away.

I'm so busy thinking new thoughts, I almost walk between these two onionheads, violating the integrity of their marriage space, which, besides getting sucked, is the one other thing I don't want to do today. I lunge to the side just as they step apart to clothesline me with their chain, and I hit the ground between a pair of storm-trooper boots.

I look up and the onionhead looks down grinning like he's been waiting all day for this to happen. The other one lets go with a war-cry, the call of the violated onionhead spouse, and goes for me. I roll the other way and the onionhead bellyflops on cement, pulling her spouse down on top of her. I'm gone before they untangle themselves, but two blocks away, I can still hear them bellowing.

Onionhead marriage is about as crazy as you can get without going up on a tower with an assault-laser.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I'm standing in front of a place called Savonarola's Icon-Busters, which claims it can over-ride my religious, political, or other fixated condition, including Oedipus and Electra complexes, or just rid me of my unwanted tendency to defer to authority. There's this big looping holo of Savonarola (I guess) in the window, panning the street like a grinning camera, all teeth and nose, and a canned voice saying, "Don't worry... kick *ass*... don't worry... kick *ass*" over and over.

Now, I know what they got in there, which is about the cheapest kind of aversion therapy, where they fix it so every time you think about your father or something, you throw up or black out for a second or get a flash-migraine. What it really is is a spank-parlor, a place for clowns who want to be punished for loving what they love. Doesn't bust many icons, but it keeps the emergency rooms and dry-cleaners in business, not that they're hanging by a string or anything.

Good place for a snitch-stop, anyway. Who's gonna figure somebody named Savonarola for that kind of aria?

I step inside and the first thing I see is this guy sitting over in the corner on a pile of ratty old cushions who is obviously the guy in the holo. Don't worry, kick ass. Makes sense to me. The guy looks at me, grunts, and closes his eyes. Just then, a Savonaroloid in a rubber suit comes through the curtained doorway from the back room, and when he sees me, he looks like he's gonna puke himself. Maybe that makes me an icon now. I could get into that.

The Savonaroloid crooks a finger like he thinks the air's itchy and he's got to scratch it. "Come on," he says. "You're late, you think everything waits for you?"

Now, he's one of those big guys, not like a man-mountain, but the kind that looms over you, with a mean jaw, ruby eyes, and nasty hair he cuts himself without looking in a mirror. Not somebody I want to argue with, even if he wasn't already in the mood to do a little bodily harm. I follow him into the back and we go down this narrow hall. It doesn't look familiar to me, but I keep thinking it's supposed to. There are all these closed doors, and I can hear muffled groans and moans and just before we get to the last door, somebody yells, *Nothing's sacred, and what if it was!*

"Some of your customers really grind on it," I say.

"That's not a customer." The guy unlocks the door and shoves me inside. There's a system on a table up against one wall and two lawn chairs and a lot of crappy soundproofing tiles that don't work on the walls. He jerks his chin at one of the chairs and goes over to the system, which looks like it's built out of flea-market surplus.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

None of the component housings match and upgrade chips are sticking all over like little shiny warts.

He catches me giving his pile of junk a funny look. "Hey, it works," he says, and tosses me a pair of connections.

"Um . . . you got a tank?"

"Don't rush me." He wanders over with what looks like a dog-bowl and holds it out. "Okay, any time. You pop 'em yourself, we don't provide valet service here. In case you didn't remember."

I've got my fingers up around my right eye and something tells me I don't really want to do this. For one thing, I've never felt any special need to get spanked and for another, I can't think of anything I worship. A jones is not an icon.

"You wanna ice cream scoop?" he says, all sour.

"You got one?"

"No. Come on, pop 'em and let's go."

I get the right eye out and drop it in the tank, but the left one's like a greased pig, I feel like I'm gonna end up squirting it through my head and out my ear. "How about just one eye out," I say.

He bends down and the last thing I see is his hooked pinky coming at me.

When I felt the guy split after entering the system, I couldn't believe my good luck—I'd hit a deep-undercover operative on the first try. His imp went into an activity loop with the spank-program and my own imp, while the part of him that was Brain Police came looking for signs indicating he was in touch with another officer. He found them easily enough—one cop always knows another. But he didn't find me.

The problem was, I hadn't realized how much Hercules' joybuzzer had screwed everything up. It was like being bound and gagged and locked in a closet, but able to watch everything through a hyper-peephole. The undercover's confusion at my absence made ripples all over the place, but there was no way I could even signal him from my confinement.

About the only thing he could figure out was that I was inaccessible while my imp was in the loop with his, doing whatever it was they could possibly do together. Was Marya really the type who'd be interested in a place like this?

Abruptly, a new piece of information squirted in on me out of nowhere—Marya had appointments with every joint on the snitch-list, except for Sojourn For Truth, because hallucinogens weren't safe. But *Marya* was supposed to know this, not me, and it was supposed to have come to her only when she entered each place, where she would be engaged in some kind of innocuous activity while an undercover made contact with me. Hercules' joybuzzer had scrambled even more than I'd

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thought and there was no way to put it all back where it belonged short of a turbo-job.

I know you've got to be in here somewhere, he said suddenly. *And if you're not coming out, I guess you've got your reasons. I've been deep undercover for a month now and this is the first time I've been out. Savonarola picked up word about some new merchandise this morning, so I have to assume that's why the department made this appointment for you, if you can't come out and tell me yourself.*

He waited to see if I were going to pop up. I couldn't even flash a color at him.

If you don't come out and talk, I don't know what information to give you, he added, with a prod.

How long was it going to take him to figure out something was wrong? I started to get angry, which did me no good at all.

And if you're in trouble, he went on suddenly, *I can't help you. I'm stuck for another month, until I rotate out of undercover intelligence gathering. As soon as we disconnect, I'm dormant till they pull me in, or until I'm contacted again.*

Our wonderful intelligence gathering method: gather intelligence and know nothing at the same time. Someone thought that made sense. Hell, I probably thought so, when I was myself.

All right, he said. *You'll have to try the next address on your informant list. Sorry, time's up; they're coming out of the loop. Good luck, whoever you are.*

That about summed it up: good luck, whoever I was.

It's not just his lousy technique with the eyes that makes me mad. "So what was all that?" I say, getting up off the cheesy lawnchair. "I don't remember a thing!"

The Savonaroloid just shrugs. "If you don't remember anything, it's because there's nothing to remember. That's not *my* fault."

"Fuck if it ain't."

"Go ahead and fuck it, who's stopping you?" He's busy piddling with all the little system components on the table. "You're only going to get out of this what you bring to it. I can't help it if you didn't have anything to bring." He looks over his shoulder at me. "And I don't like your attitude."

"You're a spank artist," I say. "You don't like *anything*." I stomp out, up the hall to the front room. Savonarola is still sitting like a lump on his pillows. This must be what he does all day, lump out.

I'm about to stomp out when he holds up a box. "The Savonarola home game, so to speak," he says, "good for twenty-four hours of home treatment after in-clinic therapy."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In-clinic. That's the best lie anyone's told me all day. I know that in the box there's this volatile bag with connections hanging out of it, and I'm supposed to plug them in and get my illusions shattered or something. Icon-busting's a good racket—if you got no icons to bust, so what, that's your problem and they still get their money.

I mean to stomp on out the door, but instead I say, "You sell one of those to Anwar?"

His whole face shifts, kinda flattens out in some way. "How do you know Anwar?" he wants to know.

"Never mind. Next time Anwar drops by for a puke, you can tell him I know his dirty little secret." I take the air, and half a block away, I start thinking again.

What I just did was not too smart. I go into a place that's probably a snitch-stop, and I take a treatment I can't remember phoning in for, and when I come out of it, I can't remember that, either. Jesus, am I getting sclerosis after all? The whole place has gotta be a Brain Police operation and God knows what they slipped out of me. Maybe all they found out was I didn't know anything, but still, I got no memory of anything and the only ones who operate that way are the Brain Police. So—

Wait a minute. If it's a Brain Police operation, they should have found her, the cop.

Hell, maybe they did. Maybe they're following me around waiting for me to lead them to Monkey Shock. Except I'm so scrambled from electroshock, they're lucky to get alphabet soup from me. I'm not worth following. I decide I got to believe that as I head for the next address on the list, because the only other possibility is that the cop is riding piggy-back on me and she just told them everything I know and maybe a few things I don't, and this idea is too weird even for an old hard-core hype-head like me.

The next address is a fetishizer. Yow! Now, why does anyone want a fetish? It's supposed to be sexy, but how jaded do you have to be to go become a toe-sucker? The place has a lot of rooster-boys dangling in the vicinity, which makes me think of mine, only I don't see him.

And then I got to pause for a second, because all of a sudden, I can't remember him too well. When did we cook our deal? Where was I gonna meet him? There's a small memory lane across the way and, for a minute, I think maybe I should go over and buy myself a good boost, get everything put in order. It oughta handle the electroshock amnesia. Thing is, it could pop up the cop, too,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and I don't want her too handy, her I want to forget and maybe she'll go away. It could happen.

One of the rooster-boys at the curb is grinning and getting ready to unbuckle, so I nip inside before he shakes me down for stiffing his stiffstuff. Rooster-boys are the only people in the world who expect a tip just for having a pickle in their pocket. I think.

There's a woman sitting behind a high desk; she's bald except for one shiny bunch of hair sticking up like a horn just over her forehead, and she's busy ignoring the two or three nut-cases sitting in a little roped-off area, watching the catalog run on the wall until they get called in to get fetishized. I glance at the screens and look away quick. Jesus, who wants a *tongue* fetish? What is it with *mouths* today, why can't I get away from them?

Then I have this very weird flash, of some other woman behind a desk, spitting. The next thing I know, I'm hanging by my fingertips on the edge of a desk, dizzier than shit. One-horn takes a look and pounds my fingers with her fist, bang-bang-bang.

"We don't do fuck-ups," she says. "Go down the street and get your blood changed first, if you're so damned good-to-go."

"I'm not fucked up, I tripped." I straighten up and push the spitter out of my head.

Her expression changes from pissed to sour. "Oh. Didn't recognize you in your make-over. I suppose you want the usual."

"God," I say, "what cheap, lousy kind of a fetish keeps wearing off?"

"*Your* kind. What do you want for the money, a lousier childhood?" She points her horn at the waiting area. "Buzz is busy, I'll call you when she's ready."

"But—"

She growls. *"I'll call you.* Or would you rather I whipped you?"

"Whatever's right, *darling.*"

She starts to get up and I head for the waiting area. There are four grumpy souls who look like the day wasn't worth it, still watching the wall because there's nothing else to do. I take a seat that might be far enough from this funny-looking ratbag to keep from smelling her breath. She turns and looks at me and, son of a bitch, she's got *flies* in her eyes!

"I'm waiting for a friend," she says.

I look behind me to see if she's talking to someone else. *"I* care?"

"Fuck if *I* know. If you had *this*, you wouldn't need to come here." She moves over a seat closer. "Listen, truth is, I was gonna give him a little extra twist in his tail, a hot fetish, but you know, maybe I don't really wanna do that. It's such a really fine memory the way it is."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yeah?" I have no idea what she's talking about, but she said the magic word—*memory*—so I'm listening.

"I told you, three hours in a state of grace. Can a fetish do that for you? Hell, no."

She told me? "Refresh my memory," I tell her. "It's been a long day."

Now she gives me a funny little look. "This guy is so incredible, words don't do the job. You gotta be there. It really happened. Once in a lifetime thing. I'm not just eating on it, either. It's like I got a duty to everyone who never had the experience."

"You remember it pretty good?"

"Better than you remember *me*," she mutters, and then goes on and on, but I'm not hearing her anymore, because I got a bad feeling about this. I'm running into people I don't remember and doing things I don't remember, and it's weirder than just electroshock amnesia.

Fly-Eyes gets up and starts trying to pull me out and then there's this big beefy woman in fur underwear clamped on my other arm, saying, "Okay, love, I'm ready for you."

Fly-Eyes pulls her hand off me. "We've changed our minds, thank you."

The fetishizer grabs my shirt. "Make an appointment. This is *my* time we're on, now."

"You don't say it's your time until *she* says it's your time." Fly-Eyes pulls harder on my arm. My shirt seams start to groan, or maybe it's me, because I'd like to know what the hell my usual is, and if I've got a "usual" how could I forget *that*, even after electroshock?

I pull loose from both of them. "Changed my mind on everything," I say. "Catch onto you later when I'm feeling more like myself." *That's* the truth.

"Frigid!" they yell together, and I feel a jump inside, like I almost remember something. Then it's gone. Goddam electroshock. I gotta remember never to do *that* again.

The sign out in front of the rundown wannabee parlor says, *First-Run Features Available! New Releases Daily! Come In and BROWZE Our Enormous Selection!*

Who do they think they're fooling? They won't even spring for holo and they expect anyone to believe they've got first-run features? Sure.

I go on in anyway, and the inside looks like they moved out and forgot to tell anyone—except for the screens on the walls, there's just a guy who's had a badder day than I have, slouched behind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a counter. He's got the worst orange home-dye job all over. I mean, he looks like Attack of the Living Carrot. You don't see a lot of idiots going into deliberate beta-carotene poisoning these days. I'm not too sure this idiot is seeing me. Each vomit-green eye is looking in a different direction and his face is all screwed up like he's sitting on a bed of nails.

The screens on the walls don't seem to be playing any first-run stuff, just the junk you can get anywhere. You gotta be some serious wannabee case to come into a place like this. Or a snitch.

While I'm walking around looking at the screens, this woman stumps stiff-legged out of a door at the back and goes over to the desk. She doesn't say a word, just slams down a keystrip. He slides it off the desk and tucks it away somewhere and she stumps out, rebounding off each side of the doorframe before she makes the street. Watching this, I suddenly get this strange little rush, like, *did my life just pass before my eyes?*

I look over at the orange guy. He still doesn't say anything so I go over to him. He hardly knows I'm there. Well, yah, why should he bother, the bottom dropped out of the wannabee trade a long time ago and he probably can't figure out why this place is still in business. Any wannabee who can pay the freight owns their own system that lets them be the hero in the movie. And the ones that can't don't have enough to rent anything but the junk and, shit, who'd wannabee junk? Did I really just ask that question?

Then I want to bang my head on the counter a few times, just to see what I can shake loose, because it comes to me that maybe this is the place where you can say the secret word and get something nobody else has. Like Sovay. Or anyone else who's been sucked lately, like a cop.

"What you got in first-run?" I say.

It's like he wakes up. "Who wants to know?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Means what it means. Who wants to know?"

I don't like his attitude. "You ask Anwar that when *he* comes in?"

Now I get a reaction, but I really hate it. He's over the counter and one bad orange hand is around my throat. *"I'm* Anwar. Who the fuck are *you* supposed to be?"

And just when I think it can't get any better, the door to the back opens again and Coney Loe comes out.

For a second, he stares and I stare and Anwar keeps on squeezing. Then Coney comes over and I'm struck by lightning.

The feel of the floor against my face and knees and the backs of my

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hands was solid enough to let me know that *I* was awake this time and back in conscious control. But the control felt shaky and fragile, as if any sudden moves would send me plummeting down into dormancy and bring Marya up again. That was all right; I didn't know where I was or what the conditions were, so I wasn't about to get active in a hurry.

Sometime after I became aware of the floor, the voices faded in.

". . . following *you?* She didn't mention *you,* she mentioned *me.*"

"But you just said she obviously didn't know you."

"She knows *now.*"

"Because you *told* her, you fucking orange idiot. You got no fucking chill to you, you're gonna have to do a lot better than that when we get to the grieving widow and her little harem. *She* probably knows your name, too, by now. For all we know, that's how the little queenie over there got your name in the first place."

"There's a whole *bunch* of names to pick from—Fortray, Easterman, Pushkin—"

My attention started to drift as a dreamlike image of an orange man sitting behind the counter in a wannabee joint formed in my mind. The image of the real Sovay superimposed itself for a moment and then vanished, leaving the memory of the immediate past behind. When I get the picure, I get the *picture.*

"So maybe Anwar was the only name they had when little queenie found them. Ever think of that?"

"No. Why would it be? Fortray was first, then Easterman. Fortray wouldn't have any names, Easterman would only have Fortray, I'd have Easterman, Fortray—"

"Shut your stupid orange mouth!" Coney Loe was showing more temper than I'd thought he'd had. But then, I would never have expected him to rear up and joybuzz me, either. That would teach me to equate burnout with a lack of motivation. But at least I'd been right; Coney knew plenty. I was going to enjoy booking him on felony accessory. "You don't know shit. For all you know, Fortray's got the whole damn address book in his head, or Easterman does, or someone else does." Pause. "*Now* what's the matter with you?"

"He wants up again."

"Well, tell him to take a nap."

"I already told him that about a dozen times."

"You didn't tell him hard enough. You're probably gonna be the first person in a hundred years to die of beta-carotene poisoning."

Worried noise. "How orange am I?"

"You got eyes, look for yourself."

"Hey, did she move?"

Had I moved? I concentrated on being limp, but I heard footsteps stomp

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hard across the floor and a moment later, Coney Loe picked me up by the back of my shirt.

"Perk up now, or I'll drop you on your face and charge you for the improvement."

A rush of adrenaline went through me

and the next thing I know, I'm looking at Coney Loe, the stupid person's God.

"Well?" he says.

"Hey, if your nut's in a wringer, it's all your own fault," I say, getting my feet on the floor and pulling my shirt out of his fist. We're all in some kinda storeroom that must be in the back of the wannabee joint, because there's pieces of wannabee helmet-projectors laying around on shelves, and an old reformatter sitting on a desk. "You and the Monkey Shock gang. If they didn't want any trouble, they—"

But this is very strange. I'm feeling things rearranging themselves in my head even while I'm talking, and what it says is, I got no rooster-boy waiting on me and I never got to Monkey Shock in the first place, I was on my way when I got sidetracked because a cop wanted me to follow somebody's grieving widow—no, that doesn't make shitsense, because the cops pulled me in before and I gave them nothing—

"The whole world is waiting," Coney Loe says. "Did you just run down your own drain, or what."

"*What*," I say. "I got shocked and dumped. In a fucking *crib*. What kinda thing is that to do to the trade?"

Coney Loe looks over his shoulder at the orange guy, who shrugs. "I didn't see her there," says Super-Carrot. "What's her name? Maybe she's on the list."

Coney Loe looks up at the ceiling, like *beam me outa here*. "Wait, let me find her bug and you can just talk right into it. They'll get a clearer voice-print back at headquarters."

"What?" Super-Carrot looks confused.

"Little queenie's on fucking *patrol*, you idiot, she's a judas for the Brain Police—"

"That's a lie!" I yell, and I pop his hype-head chocks so hard he goes down like the sack of shit he is

Loe lying on the floor and my hand hurt like hell, my whole arm hurt, all the way up to my shoulder. The orange guy was looking at me warily, as if he were trying to decide whether he should be scared or not. Obviously I'd just swung on Coney Loe, but I couldn't remember why. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

second shock I'd gotten had made some new changes in my relationship with Marya, blocking memories arbitrarily and setting us to switch dominance on an adrenaline trigger. I'd have to go sub-zero to stay in control and I doubted I was capable of maintaining that. On the other hand, Marya was excitable enough that I probably wouldn't be down for long. Just long enough to get stuck with whatever mess she'd gotten us into.

Coney Loe got up slowly, holding his jaw. It was already starting to swell and he looked as if he were going to take me apart.

"Hey, Coney," said the orange guy nervously. "If she is a judas, you don't want to fry her here. Besides, she's probably got lots of great stuff we could use." Coney Loe turned and glared at him.

"Or sell," he added, taking a step back. "We could part her out everywhere, we—" His eyes rolled up suddenly and his eyelids fluttered.

Coney made a disgusted noise. "Oughta fry you both, let God sort you out."

The orange man shook his head and stood up straighter. The change was astounding. There was no strong physical resemblance between this guy and Sovay, but the pure authenticity of the expression on his face left no doubt as to who was driving now.

"You don't have much longer," he said to Coney, ignoring me. "It's a matter of hours before I overwrite him completely. So you can call your sucker pals and get me out of here, or you can finish playing with whores—" he nodded at me "—while I call the Brain Police."

All at once there was a joybuzzer in Coney's hand and I reacted to the sight before I could th

ink I must be having petty-mals one after another, because it's like a bad splice in an antique film: Coney Loe is flashing a joybuzzer at the orange guy and the orange guy is in the fighter's crouch that I know he couldn't do if he was still himself.

"Come at me," the orange guy says, grinning. "I'd like that. *I'm* driving now and I'm mad. I *want* to dance with you. I've had fight training from half a dozen schools and just because it was all stagework doesn't mean I always pull my punches."

Coney looks wary. "I *hate* you," he says. "I hate you even worse than I hate Anwar."

The orange guy has a very nasty smile. "I'll tell him you send your best. Come on. I was reading for the bullyboy part in *Black Friday* and the Method *demands* that I beat the shit out of somebody."

Coney Loe flicks on the joybuzzer. "You want to dance, come ahead. You'll just buzz us both out and we won't be any closer to the suckers. And little queenie'll have the Brain Police waiting for us when we wake up."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"That's a lie!" I yell with the weirdest feeling of déjà-voodoo, and pick up the nearest thing I can lay hands on which happens to be a wannabee helmet, and I

saw it hit Coney Loe right in the face. There was a short crackling sound and he went down again, blood pouring out of his nose. Somehow he kept getting Marya extremely angry at him; if we didn't make some kind of progress soon, she was going to kill him.

I turned to the orange man and my own memories came up in an instant. He was still Sovay, or Sovay-as-whoever, and my relief at the blind dumb luck of such a break almost blacked me out again.

"Which Sovay are you?" I asked.

He looked at me suspiciously; still holding his fighter's crouch.

"Which one!" I yelled. "I've seen two others—Dennie Moon and Dionysius. And your wife, in passing. What are you and Coney trying to do?"

He glanced at Sovay, who was out cold and not moving. "Reintegrate," he said, after a moment. He dropped his hands and straightened up. "I don't know what's become of the original by now, but I've been sending myself out in character and—"

"I know, I know, you said already. Another you." I wanted to give my head a hard shake to clear it and felt a small wave of vertigo, like a warning: *don't even get impatient or it's lights out.* I blinked, slowing my breathing. "Reintegration's impossible."

"Not if you're a bonafide multiple."

"Multiple?" Confusion sent another warning wave of mild dizziness through me. If I had to get any more laid-back, I was going to be on a respirator.

"Multiple personality." He looked proud. "Instead of being 'cured' "—he spat the word as much as spoke it—"I keep reprogramming them all. I've got a dozen, not counting myself and the one designated as director, who is still back in the box. Multiple personality is a definite advantage for those who choose to tread the boards." His smug look darkened. "We were all sent out deliberately and we can all be taken back in again. If we can get together in time. Every one of me has instructions to find our way to each other however we can, but I don't know who we are. The information junkie told me he could find the suckers for me so I could access their loathesome client list." He glanced at Coney disdainfully. "I don't think he actually knows anything."

I'd never heard of this happening before, even with a multiple personality, which was a fairly rare condition. Or was it? I felt confused and dizzy again. In any case, I doubted he—or they—could do it. He wasn't working out of a living brain any more. The original Sovay was in a sucker box, if he was still in existence at all, while the organism that had been Sovay was in quarantine becoming someone else.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your, uh, person you're in now might know something," I said. "Have you tried tapping him?"

He looked disgusted. "That idiot's impossible. I tried getting to him and he went and got this atrocious dye-job. I'm rewriting him, but it isn't easy. The man is bone-stick-stone stupid; I have to keep elevating his intellect and I think his stupidity is rubbing off on me instead. All I can get is a few names. He knows a lot more than I do but I can't get to it." He seemed to catch himself suddenly and frowned at me. "What's *your* story?"

Coney Loe groaned and began to stir. "Later, maybe. We have to get Coney to lead us to your suckers."

His eyes narrowed. "You *are* Brain Police."

"Shut up," I said quietly. "Pretend this is a play and we're both somebody else."

He pointed at Coney Loe. "Shouldn't we just tie him up or something?"

"We need him to get to the suckers. He's our ticket in."

Coney Loe sat up, furious. "I'm going to punch *your* ticket." He pushed himself to his feet, holding out the hand with the joybuzzer, still live, and started to come for

me and I rip one of the combs outa my hair

moving it back and forth, trying to maintain a fighter's calm, but the first shock I'd gotten in the crib had conditioned a fear reaction

goes that bad splice again and hell, is *any* memory worth this kinda shitstorm I wonder

how long I could keep flipping back and forth like this before something just gave and I blacked

outa here, the hell with Monkey Shock and Coney Loe and this crazy orange idiot, what I need's a dry-cleaner and then there's this big bang

ed open and there was Hercules and Sovay/Moon and Rowan and some other strange guy in a purple satin tuxedo with tails. Purple Tuxedo was holding a box under one arm. His other hand was gripping the arm of a big beefy woman wearing what looked like a fur bikini. Hercules and Rowan

mouthkissing and I know for certain I just put myself in it but good. People who mouthkiss are capable of *anything*, I'll be lucky if I get

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to an emergency room with enough stuff left in my head to re-grow the personality of an acorn squash. Purple Tuxedo points at Super Carrot. "Anwar," he says, "I've got your number."

The look on the grieving widow's face is like, I don't know *what*. Like love and being mad as hell over it.

"Don't worry," says Super Carrot. "I'm driving."

"So am I," Purple Tuxedo tells him, and they both relax.

At least Coney Loe has stopped backing me up against the wall. He's standing there in the middle of the room with the joybuzzer in his hand trying to figure out what's going on now. Even God gets mixed up once in a while, I guess.

Purple Tuxedo jerks his head at the stringy-haired ratatat next to him. "And he's with us, too. But we have to negotiate with our other new friend here."

"That's fair," says the big mouthkisser defensively, putting one arm around the grieving widow. "I didn't ask for *this.* All I wanted was a career in the legitimate theatre."

Super Carrot gives him a superior look. "Ah. Awfully hard to get an audition after you've done hard-core."

"I had to make a living!" the mouthkisser whines.

"Everybody just hold still," Coney Loe says, waving the joybuzzer around, and it's like they see him for the first time.

"Who *is* this?" says Purple Tuxedo, like someone forgot to take out the trash.

"He's supposed to help me find the suckers," says Super Carrot.

Purple Tuxedo shoves Fur Underwear forward. She's got a black eye. "Forget it. I found them. Her, and him." He points at himself. "What do you think, Abelard and Heloise? Or Caligula and his sister?"

"Don't get snotty with me," Fur Underwear snaps. "You were just a half-brained sucker before you put your hand in the cookie jar. I *knew* I shouldn't have trusted you."

Purple Tuxedo makes a move toward her just as Super Carrot grabs my arm and says, "And *she's* the Brain Police."

Everybody freezes except Coney Loe, who says, "Big fucking surprise!" and jumps at me. I dive sideways, bracing myself, expecting to go out again. Instead, I hit the floor, roll, and fetch up against the orange idiot, who hauls me up by one arm and swings me at the mouthkisser, who puts a half-Nelson on me in this very casual way. This bimbo's *strong;* if he wants to mouthkiss, I won't have much to say about it.

Coney Loe, meanwhile, has joybuzzed himself again, not enough

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to go out, but he's sitting against the wall looking dazed and trying to figure out how to stand up. This is not his day. Super Carrot, who definitely got a whole lot smarter when he changed drivers, relieves him of the joybuzzer and tosses it to Purple Tuxedo, who gives it to the mouthkisser, who shows it to me without comment.

"What are we going to *do?*" demands the grieving widow, sounding like she's at the end of the last fray on her rope. "With her and him?"

"Listen, now," Coney Loe says, suddenly, "I can tell you who ordered this hit. You probably think you're working for yourselves—" he pushes himself up the wall slowly. "You're *not.*"

"Sure," says Super Carrot. "You don't know where Monkey Shock *is*, but you know who they work for. I'll buy *that* for a million dollars."

"It's my business to know things," Coney Loe says, sounding desperate now. "It's what I do."

Mouthkisser gives me a little shake. "Must be something you can do with *her*, then."

"I'm not the Brain Police," I say, trying to get my head out from under his big hand without breaking my neck. The stringy-haired guy suddenly steps forward to take a good look at me.

"It's her," the grieving widow says absently. "From the crib. I didn't know what she wanted." She gives Stringy-Hair a disgusted look. "You had to go fooling around with her."

Something changes in his face and he looks around quick, like he's ready to bolt. Purple Tuxedo buzzes him and he goes down like a stone.

"What did you do that for?" yells the mouthkisser. "You expect *me* to carry him around?"

"He was flipping back," says Purple Tuxedo. "He wasn't us anymore. Anyway, nobody has to carry anyone around. We can do everything right here." He pats the box under his arm. "I've got the original, we'll just use the available hardware."

Super Carrot nods. "Fine. Put her to sleep and we'll set up."

I don't have to ask who they're putting to sleep even if there was time to get the question out of my mouth.

But they didn't knock me out entirely. Apparently the juice in the buzzer was running low. I went down paralyzed but wide-awake. They left me where I'd fallen, so I had a good view of the whole set-up procedure.

Purple Tuxedo had to buzz her lightly a few times, but the woman in the fur bikini did most of the work, stripping a wannabee helmet down to the skull-frame and the ocular connections and rewiring the program-loader to fit the box containing Sovay.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The box sat off to the side on a table, looking deceptively small and banal. Coney Loe was lying on the floor with new blood leaking out of his nose, eyes closed, though I had the feeling he wasn't really out, just from the way his eyelids twitched. Perhaps Hercules had popped him just on general principle. Hercules had gotten hyperactive; he kept getting all over Rowan, and Rowan kept alternately kissing him and pushing him away. I watched this long enough for the feeling to return to my arms and legs. I actually crawled all the way to the door before someone noticed.

I gotta get my head right. If I still have a head. Feels like somebody took it off and threw it away. I can hear the flies buzzing around it in the garbage. Like I haven't had enough buzzing today.

After a while, I realize, it's people's voice, not buzzing and there's that déjà-voodoo again—I feel like I did this not too long ago, and maybe I'm doing it again because I didn't do it right. Am I in a play, or is this just bad karmic backlash? Do I believe in karma? What do I know?

All I know is I'm a hype-head lying on the floor under a table with what feels like a few cracked ribs and a broken nose, and I am looking up at the bottom of the table, and scratched on the underside of the table is, *If U can read this, U R meat.*

Makes shitsense at least.

"... make a deal?" says the grieving widow's voice.

"Woman, you are not in a dealing position," says someone else. A guy in a purple tuxedo, I think, even if I can't see him. "Nobody touches Brain Police. Nobody sucks them."

"We don't *know* she's Brain Police," says the grieving widow. "And if she is, can't you just flush her?"

"Markie, tell her about residue."

"No time," says another woman. This must be Fur Underwear. "We're kneedeep in Sovays here: you wanna do it now, or you wanna wait till we're *ass*-deep?"

"We'll start now," says Purple Tuxedo. "And collect the ones that are still loose later."

"You *had* to sample the merchandise," says Fur Underwear miserably. "You *had* to find out what was going on. I hope you're happy, you half-brain."

"I'm *much* happier." Purple Tuxedo actually chortles, a sound I could have gone without hearing. I shift some and my ribs are on fire. Little by little, I scrunch along until I just get my head out from under the table *(If U can read this, U R meat,* yah, thanks for the reminder) and then I'm looking at Fur Underwear's bare legs. Be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yond her, Rowan's standing around practically hopping from one foot to the other and trying to keep Hercules from pawing her too much. Nearby, Stringy-Hair has perked up considerably. Sovay must be really taking charge in that old hype-head.

Fur Underwear spots me and tries to shove me back under the table with her foot. Her name's Buzz, I remember now, which is the goddamnedest thing, considering what I've been through today. I wonder what she was busy doing when I showed up at the fetishizer joint. In for my usual, sure. Was I gonna get a piece of this without even knowing it? Am I some kinda dump for sucker leftovers, and I don't even know it? How can I *not* know that?

Maybe I'm not supposed to remember that part. Shit. In for my usual, *sure.*

And now I'm thinking all kinds of strange shit, about what am I screwing with suckers for, if they'll suck someone, they'll jack everyone else around till they don't know where-to and is this any way to live. So right then I know I have been jacked past one of those critical points they're always talking about because *I* do not think like this. Not all alone, I don't.

". . . reintegrated," Rowan is saying, "I'll take the box with me."

"Like hell," says Fur Underwear. "I built this *myself.*"

"I'll make it worth your while," Rowan says. "You might as well, because it's worthless to you now. You'll never get rid of Sovay, not even if you run a flush-and-purge every ten minutes. He *is* the box now. That's the Method at work, you know."

I think I can hear Fur Underwear's teeth grinding. No, it's the box. It's hooked up and running now. I crawl out from under the table again, right into Super Carrot, who hauls me up like a cat. "Speaking of the Brain Police . . . " he says.

"Oh, that's just one of our regular memory junkies," Fur Underwear says. "We've been using her as a dump for ages. And she pays for the privilege. She's got a real memory jones."

She makes me sound like a lower form of life. Lower than a sucker? Maybe, if I'm buying sucker leftovers. What am I thinking this for, I never think like that.

"But if you insist she's Brain Police," Fur Underwear goes on, "we'll just run the test." She slings one of my arms over her shoulder with this smarmy fondness that makes me want to punch her. "Now, what would Marceline be doing with the Brain Police?"

Marceline? I'm wondering if it can get weirder as she walks me over to an old dentist's chair and lets me fall into it. She takes a good look into my eyes just before she reaches for the left one.

That's it, I think, and I try to open my mouth to scream, but some-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing *really* weird happens. All of a sudden, she's moving underwater, I can even see little whorls and eddies around her hand, but the hand moves slower and slower, and I'm thinking what is *this* when a trapdoor opens in my mind and I fall through it.

That's about the only way I can describe it. Everything just went out from under me and the next thing I knew, I was sitting in a strange, badly-lit room. There was a sense of other people all around, but the light was either too bright or too dim, or perhaps there was something wrong with my inner eye—

"First, stay calm," says this woman's voice. "Obviously, we've had some trouble, and if you don't know what it is, don't worry about it."

I tried to see who was speaking but the light failed completely.

"This is your reassurance program," the voice goes on. "a façade program is in place for the current probing. So far, no probe has managed to reach this level, so we're all safe for the moment."

Trying to move my perspective was no good, either. I seemed to be mired in something like liquid rubber or gelatin.

"You cannot be briefed at this time," says the voice. "Please gather your resources, as we will be re-emerging in a matter of moments. Be prepared; obviously, our FAT's in the fire, so to speak, and any one of you could end up driving. For your information, which you will not be able to take with you anyway, the electrical shocks have done no permanent damage. Things are just a little scrambled and some of the memory has been rendered unreadable in some sectors, readable in other sectors where it shouldn't be, and garbled all over. This can be repaired."

"I quit!" I yelled. Or I heard myself yell. It felt like me, but it also felt remote, as if it were someone like me. Which didn't make shitsense(?).

"Your contract expires after this," the voice says. "Make your decision then."

"How can I?" I say, or something. "I never get to drive!"

"About to engage with real-time," said the voice politely. "Drive carefully, whoever you are."

My eyes refocused on the face of the woman in the fur bikini. The man in the purple tuxedo was crowded in next to her.

"No Brain Police in there," he said, sounding relieved.

"I told you *that.*" She turned away to beckon to Rowan. "Here's what it is," she said, as Rowan pushed the guy in the purple tuxedo aside. "The best way to go is, we give you the dump here, and you can use her to re-integrate your husband. I know it's a woman instead of a man, but I think you'll get better results with her brain. Dumps are used to taking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all kinds of stuff, they're a little more plastic somehow. She'll make a better adjustment."

Hercules came up on Rowan's left. "I like this one," he said, pointing to himself. "I mean, just *look* at him. *You* like him, too. I know you do."

Rowan looked from me to him and back again, troubled. "Yes, but we've got to go with the best chance we've got. She says—"

"Oh, Christ, Rowan, what would *she* know, is she a neurosurgeon? Use *this* me. I've got this guy so rewritten already—"

Rowan let out a deep breath. "Aesthetically, you're preferable, but . . . " She looked at me again.

This is giving me the chills. Some grieving widow. Thinks nothing of just commandeering whoever's handy to get her husband back. Must be some husband. Maybe if it were my husband, I'd do the same, but I can't believe she'd just go with these suckers and take someone out to get him back. She doesn't even know if she really can get him back, I never hearda anyone

Peculiar. I hadn't blacked out that time but Marya came up, didn't notice me, and went away again. That wasn't supposed to be possible.

"Hey," said Hercules. "*I'm* a volunteer. It oughta go easier with a volunteer."

The woman in the fur bikini reached over and patted my head carelessly. "Nobody's going to miss *this* one, I can tell you that. You can get her sex changed, you're rich enough. Make her over completely."

"Is that *really* our best chance?" Rowan asked. She might have been getting a second opinion from a specialist.

"You're a lot less likely to get caught, too."

Rowan shrugged. "Plug her back in, then, and let's get it over with."

"Hook up the box," said the other woman. She started to turn toward me and I was gone again.

There was no relaxation exercise, just a few seconds of sleep, and then Sovay's rehearsal studio came up around me like the dawn.

Sovay himself was sitting on a pillow in the middle of the room with his back to the mirrored wall. He was studying what looked like a hard-copy playscript; several more were piled on the floor beside him. He wasn't orange now. More of a golden beige bordering on brown, actually. I could tell it was completely natural.

He looked up as I melted into existence and then frowned. *Bother,* he said. *Not* another *one.*

I started to explain and everything suddenly played out on the mirrors

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

behind him, what the suckers intended to do, Rowan's part in it, and who I was.

Well, he said. *I knew one of me would have the sense to call the law. For all the good it did. Came by yourself, did you?*

I don't know, I told him.

He tossed away the script he'd been looking at and sighed. *I don't suppose you have a brilliant plan to get us out of this.*

I was about to tell him I didn't know that, either, when something gave me a powerful shove toward him. I had a brief glimpse of his face rushing at me and then, like nothing, we were back where we'd been.

God, they're crude, he said. Abruptly, something lifted him off the floor and started to toss him at me. My vision gave a jump and once again we were in our old positions.

Whoever's at the controls out there has absolutely no idea how to go about this. Sovay sounded almost amused. *But being a dedicated multiple gives you an edge over this kind of brute force. Don't you find that?* He looked past me. *You must. You're all here.*

I turned around. Marya was there, with someone similar, someone whose name was Marceline, and I didn't know how I knew that. There was another woman who looked thin and little too clean, as if she'd just come out of a rehab center, and behind them, more faces, just phantoms now, but if I kept looking, they would solidify and somehow I felt that shouldn't happen right now. I turned back to Sovay.

Some of us split spontaneously, he said. *You wouldn't want to know what makes it happen. Others, like you, can be induced to split. The talent's there, it just needs the proper stimulus. Some of us go into acting, some into police work.*

An image of Flaxie's face popped into my mind. All the neurotics in theatre.

I could go on splitting for simply ever. Right, Box? He looked around and the studio gave a slow kind of ripple that exuded a sense of affirmation. *There's another personality who is being the Box. Between the two of us and all this old material*—he patted the stack of scripts—*I can go on manufacturing selves indefinitely.* He laughed and then suddenly looked pained.

I'm looking at Fur Underwear with one eye and with the other

I was still in the box with Sovay, who was wearing an expression of revulsion. *I hate it when they do that,* he said. *It looks so awful.*

"Why won't you behave?" Fur Underwear says. That's a cruel smile she's got. Rowan's face crowds in next to hers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What's wrong?" says the grieving widow, impatient.

"They won't smoosh together. Goddam wannabee hardware."

"You should be using *me*," whines Hercules, somewhere out of my sight. "*I* wannabee him. *She* doesn't."

"Well, we're not out of options *yet*," Fur Underwear says grimly.

I'm starting to panic, because I know she's talking about flush-and-purge, and just when I think I might lose it all in a screaming fit, I feel like someone's holding my hand, but from *inside*. God—

"Guess again," I said. It was a long reach to her; I had to use Marceline to stretch and she didn't like it. Well, she'd just have to suffer. She wasn't loaded with choices. None of us were.

The cop. As soon as we make contact, I understand it all, and I'd be bugfuck, except I got more serious problems even than that. This is no time to get fussy about who I am, anyway. This is time to wonder if she's got that back-up the Brain Police are supposed to have. For once, I want to see the goddam cavalry coming through the door.

Something in my limited field of outer vision moves, somewhere behind Rowan. It's Hercules, and shit, he looks like a sore loser—

Dionysius is not *a good sport,* Sovay said. *Rowan shouldn't have crossed him.* He was doing the equivalent of looking over my shoulder out the window of my eye to the outside.

Fur Underwear goes down hard. Hercules lifts her up again by her hair, but she's offline. "Take her out!" he barks, gesturing at me.

Sovay started to tell me something and then

he flies backwards with a funny little dart in his bare chest and Rowan screams.

"Shut up," says Purple Tuxedo, tucking a little gun away in his cummerbund. "Now, do you want this or not?"

Does that piece of shit mean *me?*

Sovay's face filled my vision again, crowding out everything else. *I was afraid of this,* he said. *Flush-and-purge. Not me. You.*

You're *the box,* I said. *Can't you stop it?*

Not for you. You're not *the box.*

There's this pressure in my head, like a fist squeezing inside. Purple

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tuxedo looks into my face and nods, satisfied. I'd like to wonder which Sovay he is that could just take this up so easy, but I can't do much besides panic.

"Standard suck mode," he says to Rowan, who looks like she isn't so sure about anything any more. "If I force her in there on flush-and-purge, it could force him out into the available receptable." He pats my head. Jesus.

And then Mersine tells me how it's going to be and there's no time to argue, because we're going, we're all going, and there's a lot of noise somewhere, someone's banging on the doors, they're coming in the windows, they're falling from the ceiling, and the ceiling is falling on me, on us all, but they're too late, I don't have another second, nobody does.

Sovay started to slide past me, toward the opening I more felt than saw. I wanted to go after him, but the polarity was wrong. An invisible hammer hit me dead center, sent me flying against the mirrored wall of his rehearsal room. The mirror splintered and began to unravel in a spiral, like a cyclone picking up speed.

I spread my arms, reaching for the rest of me, imps or real multiple personalities, made no difference now.

You should have told me, Flaxie, it's against the rules but you should have told me anyway, you should have told me it wasn't an imp but a catalyst to wake her, instead of letting me be the fool to believe in what I thought I was, in what I thought any of us were.

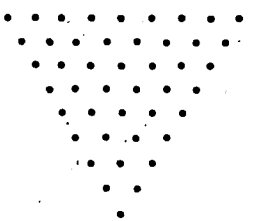
But I was the only one who had believed. The rest of me, they'd all known differently, and I *couldn't* know. Because if I had, it would have completed the circuit, it would have been the thing that linked us all and mindwipe could have taken us all out. Instead of just me. Just me. Just me. Just

reach up with my right hand and rip the connection out of my eye.

Somebody screams. It sounds like Rowan, but maybe it's me.

?

Good luck, he said. *I hope you make it.*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feels like a boulder packed into the side of my face. I can see the paramed hovering over me. Bald, blue skin, very folksy. Makes me want to pop him one, but I couldn't pop a bubble.

"... *mess,*" he's saying. "Dirty shame. *Dirty* shame. Optic nerve's *shredded,* must hurt like a son of a bitch. Gonna need a graft on that."

Rowan comes into sight behind him, and it's like I'm seeing her through the wrong end of a telescope, she looks so far away. And so familiar.

And they come and gather around her, Purple Tuxedo, String-Hair, Hercules, Super Carrot. And more, that I hadn't seen before. Are they Sovays who found their way to the source, like swimming upstream to unspawn?

"Goddamnedest things occur to you at the goddamnedest times, hey, Mersine?" says the blue paramed, and I realize I've been talking away and not even hearing it. Or maybe someone else is doing the talking and I'm just the look-out here.

Someone pushes through the Sovay gang. Fly-Eyes. She looks at me and shakes her head. Someone else moves in next to her, some guy in bad leather body armor and twinkly things stuck here and there around his mouth, and he looks purely disgusted.

"Salazar's going to spit," he says.

"Salazar's going to spit anyway," says Fly-Eyes. "It's what she does." She moves in a little closer, hovering over the paramed's shoulder. "Can you hear me in there?"

"I hear you," somebody says. Not *this* me, whoever's got the vocal cords.

"You were supposed to leave the fetishizer's with me. We had her staked out for months. We thought you might be her dump when you were driving, but we couldn't get a warrant to search her, and when you wouldn't come with me, I thought that meant you'd found out somebody else had sucked Sovay and you wanted to wait. But then you didn't respond to the trigger word."

"Trigger word?" I hear myself ask.

"*Frigid.* The second time I called you frigid, you were supposed to come with me. Marya would have gotten the wet dream while the cop was telling me what you'd found out."

"I didn't know anything except the name 'Monkey Shock,' " I say.

"It would have been all we'd needed," says the guy in bad imitation leather. "We had a chain of back-ups we could have activated, to keep an eye on you in turns."

"That don't make shitsense," I say—*I* say. "You shoulda just trig-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gered the cop and had her tell you right out."

Fly-Eyes shakes her head. "We never let our cops know exactly who's backing them up. Brain Police policy."

"In case I got sucked."

"Oh, we were *expecting* you to get sucked," she says. "Marya, that is, not Mersine. Marya came up as a variant of you, Marceline. Since you were the original dump, we couldn't risk losing you and your testimony. This certainly does screw things up. Marya has Mersine's spot in the brain now, and it's going to take ages to build another cop and put her in there—"

I go frantic, pushing to get up and pop her fucking chocks but the folksy blue paramed's got me tied down or something and he keeps pushing on my shoulders and going, "Sh, now, gotta stay calm, dirty, *dirty* shame," and he looks up at Fly-Eyes and says, "I don't think you were talkin' to who you thought you were talkin' to, maybe you oughta go think out loud someplace else before you bring on a seiz—"

They say it was sixteen hours in the hospital, but I don't remember most of it. It would have been longer, but I wouldn't stay. I told them no thanks to their graft. Fuck it, I can live without an eye, especially a Brain Police eye. And there isn't a damned thing they could do about it with my contract up and everything, except get petty and demand their clothes back. Which is what they did.

Little Blondie in the wardrobe department made a big deal out of that, having me exchange piece by piece for the cop's old clothes. Those were in better condition than what they took back, so I came out with the better end on something. But I couldn't figure out why he was taking so long and making a big fucking ceremony out of it until *she* showed up.

Skinny? I seen fatter people that *starved* to death. I couldn't believe I'd ever known this woman, but I knew I had. The cop had, I mean. There was this old memory laying around in my mind, the woman behind a desk chewing up food and spitting it into a suckhole. That made me think about mouthkissing and it just turned my stomach inside out practically, seeing her and having to think about that.

"You *are* legally entitled to leave, since your contract's up," she goes, all official. "But I wish you'd reconsider. Or at least let us give you a new optic nerve and an eye. We owe you that much."

I touch the eyepatch and think about the cop I used to be, or who used to be me, and I get the feeling she'd have wanted it this way. I mean, I don't *know*, because I never really knew her, and it's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not like cops are my favorite people even when they're *me,* but I feel bad for her, wherever she is. *I* was supposed to get sucked, not her. So I owe her a big one, and maybe I'm a fool to believe that, because maybe if she'd known all along that she was a multiple, she might have changed places with me and let me go down the drain anyway. But she never got the chance to make that choice.

"Rowan'll be doing time for that," says Skinny, nodding at my eyepatch. "And some of the Sovays. The others'll be waiting for them when they get out. I'm not sure what they'll do after that. Most of the original people have been rewritten so thoroughly they're past the point of restoration, either as themselves or as Sovay."

"Why are you telling me this?" I ask.

"I thought you'd be interested."

"I'm not. I been a dump long enough, I don't need what you're spitting out."

She looks offended, but what is she gonna do, fire me? *I* never worked here, and *I'm* driving now. If that's not fair to the rest of me, well, nothing's ever really fair. Not that I remember, anyway.

I finish the Big Clothing Exchange and ignore the pained look Little Blondie is giving me. I got this other memory laying around, just a tiny one, him looking at me and saying, *Come back when you want it taken off,* and I can't forgive him for that. He lied like a goddam rug, and I don't care if it *was* his job to do it. Maybe she'd have just gone ahead and let him suck me out, her not knowing what I really was to her, but she should have been told so she could have made that choice, too, whether to get rid of me or let me live.

Ah, fuck *her,* too. She was Brain Police, as bad as any of them. If I can live with one less eye, the world can live with one less cop.

And besides, I know something *they* don't know. For once. And it's this: she's going to grow back. Not today, not even next month, but sometime soon, she'll be filling back in. All those little memories she left laying around, the associations are already starting to reconnect, and she won't be able to help it. One of these days, she'll pop up and take a look around and wonder what the hell happened. And I'll tell her all about it, what they did to her and what they did to me and to *all* of us, and we'll see if she wants to be a cop again.

And if she does . . . well, this time she'll know more, enough that she can make the choice to give us all a chance. Maybe? I mean, *I* would. Wouldn't *she?* Don't know. Don't know. Just don't *know*

who the *hell she thinks she is.* ●

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ON BOOKS by Norman Spinrad

F & SF & GENRE EXPECTATIONS

Phases of Gravity, Dan Simmons, Bantam, $4.50.
Out on Blue Six, Ian McDonald, Bantam, $4.50.
Webs, Scott Baker, Tor, $3.95.
Weave World, Clive Barker, Pocket Books, $4.95

As a critic on most of the usual freebie lists, I receive the usual packets of books from the usual publishers of regular SF lines, and down through the years, I've watched the proportion of fantasy in relationship to science fiction grow and grow, and the subgenres thereof differentiate and multiply, to the point where science fiction has become, in terms of what flows through the mailbox from SF publishers, not much more than another subgenre of what is marketed as "SF," competing for the same rack spaces with heroic fantasy, high fantasy, modern fantasy, horror, splatterpunk, and now even fantasy romances.

It has been occasionally mentioned that I review very little fantasy in these pages, which is quite true; nevertheless it keeps pouring in, along with the Star Trek novels, and the Battlestar Galactica novels, and the franchise universe novels and anthologies, which I am loath to review also.

I don't review this stuff for the most part because to do so conscientiously would mean that I'd have to read it, a task the contemplation of which fills me with dread.

I have considered from time to time writing a column called THINGS NOT TO SEND ME, for the fact of the matter is that something like two thirds of the books in the boxes and jiffy-bags sent out to reviewers by the SF publishers, meaning about two-thirds of what is published annually as "SF," are books I have no intention of even opening.

Don't send me any more film or TV novelizations. Don't send me any more franchise universe books. Don't send me any more horror. Don't send me any more high fantasy. Don't send me any more fantasy romances. Don't waste review copies of this stuff on me.

The only reason I've never written such a column is that I know damn well it wouldn't do any good. The SF publishers' review lists are computerized; every month or so, the software spits out the mailing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

labels, the warehouse sticks them on boxes filled with one copy each of that month's list of SF books, and off they go to the regular SF reviewers, more often than not accompanied by the very same breathless promotional flyers stuffed into similar packets sent to bookstores and wholesalers.

So I'm stuck with cartons and cartons of books in which I have no interest. If only I weren't constitutionally incapable of burning books of any kind, I'd never have to buy wood for my fireplace.

Still, the process does give one quite a complete overview of the stream, or rather torrent, of what is being published as "SF" thanks to the covers and jacket copy. Continually eavesdropping on what the publishers are saying to their accounts via the reams of promotional flyers (sometimes you even get the order forms) does give me a baleful insight into the attitudes of both parties in the transaction towards the product.

Someday, when I'm really feeling slothful, I could sleaze by an impending deadline by reviewing the blurbs and promo flyers, something I am probably warning you about in print so as to vaccinate myself against the temptation, a disease to which, I would judge from what I've read as criticism from time to time, we reviewers have no natural immunity.

On the other hand, there is much to be learned by rummaging through the sales material targeted at the wholesalers and shopkeepers and the packages presented to the customers at point of sale. It certainly is an education in how bookstores, sales forces, and marketing directors perceive what they are selling as "SF," and what the whole commercial mechanism conceives of as the clientele.

One thing that becomes clear is that "SF" is no longer a coherent marketing genre. It's long since evolved into something much vaguer and vaster than that, a constellation of disparate genres piled together and jammed willy-nilly by fate and circumstances into the same allotment of undifferentiated rack slots.

There has been a great deal of debate and polemic in the past few years on the relationship between science fiction and fantasy. There are those who view fantasy as a literary degeneration of science fiction, playing the game with the net down, taking the easy way out of thoughtful and rigorous extrapolation by simply winging it. There are those who declare that fantasy is the Ur-literature of the species, and that science fiction is only a peculiarly technological variant.

As a literary debate, this dialectic has yet to resolve the question, perhaps because on a literary level science fiction and fantasy have about as much in common as either form has with the realistic novel of contemporary life. But a historical reading of the marketing tea leaves makes everything crystal clear.

Time was, there just wasn't any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such thing as fantasy being published in mass market paperback. Little new fantasy was written. "Fantasy" was thought of as literary classics pretty much confined to hardcovers sold mainly to libraries that no one saw a way of marketing on the racks.

Then *The Lord of the Rings* became an adolescent cult-object in hardcover. Through a paperwork screw-up by the original publisher, the trilogy lapsed into public domain in the United States and Ace Books took a chance on bringing out an unauthorized paperback edition, which they could easily afford to do, since they weren't paying out an advance to the author. Ace was primarily a science fiction publisher, and *The Lord of the Rings* was marketed in their SF line, for want of anything else to do with it, and it became a big bestseller.

Ballantine, another paperback publisher intimately involved with science fiction, then brought out an authorized edition which sold even better. Having had one fantasy prove economically viable and then some mass-marketed with the science fiction, Ballantine commissioned Lin Carter to put together the "Fantasy Rediscovery Series," a line of classic fantasy with its own logo within the SF line. When that proved viable, they took the next logical step, and started commissioning not so classic fantasies, mostly from their science fiction writers.

And there you have it. That's the real relationship between science fiction and fantasy. That's how it all started.

Because of Tolkein, fantasy became a viable paperback genre, and because *Lord of the Rings* was marketed in science fiction lines, that genre became attached thereto, and science fiction evolved (or devolved) into SF. Since these publishers habitually spent the lion's share of their promotional efforts for science fiction at science fiction conventions, they did the same with fantasy, and the nature of the costumes at the masquerades changed, and fantasy writers and science fiction writers found themselves hustling the same editors at the same parties, many of them found themselves writing both, fantasy credits became acceptable as SFWA credentials, and *voilà*, SF.

Since then, the process of radiation has continued. When Stephen King made horror a commercially viable genre, it was perfectly natural to publish the less than King class stuff as an offshoot of fantasy, which is to say with the "SF."

And so here we are now, with science fiction maybe a quarter or a third of what is published as SF, and competing for the same undifferentiated rack-slots with fantasy and horror.

Interestingly enough, this process has coincided with the rise of SF as a publishing category which has captured somewhere between fifteen and twenty percent of the fiction market. Yes, there is more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

science fiction published than ever before, and the sales potentials for certain books have become unlimited, but the conversion of sleepy science fiction publishing into the mighty SF industry is far more the result of absorbing all of the variants of fantasy into its bottomline demographics.

It's gotten to the point where it's bursting at the seams, where publishers have begun to struggle to break down the SF genre, which has entirely lost any coherent parameters, into subgenres targetable at the separate demographic segments of what has become the entirely fragmented SF audience.

Tor Books has differentiated out Fantasy and Horror lines, and given each a predictable separate slice of their rack space along with the science fiction. Other publishers are beginning to follow suit.

And Bantam-Spectra-Doubleday-Foundation, the whale that swallowed the elephant, the product of the SF industry's first major merger, now functions like an SF corporate conglomerate. There are two hardcover SF lines feeding into the same mass-market paperback line; in none of the three, however, is fantasy strongly differentiated from science fiction.

But Spectra-Foundation has done something else, something at once stunningly idealistic and cynically realistic. They've started a new paperback line, the Spectra Special Editions, with its own highly differentiated packaging, and they've targeted it at readers longing for some assurance that they're buying something of substance.

In this rack-space you will find seriously intended imaginative fiction, they promise. No TV novelizations, no generic fantasy, no gore, no twelve volume trilogies, no space opera, no franchise universes. We can promise you that because Bantam-Spectra-Doubleday-Foundation has other imprints where we get our fair share of those markets.

Yes, I know, I promised in public that I would not write a whole column off promotional fliers and book packages, and this is not it. Because thanks to the SFWA mailing list, a lot of the people who are writing SF these days are on the freebie list, too, and if not, they can read all about it in *Locus* and *SF Chronicle*. And they go to conventions and Nebula Weekends, and have lunch with the editors, and then they go home with their contracts and write what they conceive under the influence.

Those who do not, those who write weird things without regard to the nature of the mechanism, often have a hard time pushing their work through the machinery.

Which is to say that it's become so difficult to publish work that does not find some cozy niche in a subgenre that Spectra-Foundation created a new subgenre to contain it.

What else would you do with something like Ian McDonald's *Out on Blue Six*? McDonald is a young writer whose strongest suits are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his stylistic brilliance and fertile imagination. He's got a voice that sings the way Ray Bradbury's sings. He can do landscape and cityscape description with the poetry of Vance, and he can write snappy realistic dialogue. He creates worlds that are densely realized, baroque, and deep down alien.

Like less successful Vance, the story seemed to plod along uninvolvingly in his first novel, *Desolation Road*, which in another way reminded me of reading Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy—a story, such as it is, crawling along ponderously, while you are held barely captive by the bizarre happenings, and the sheer weirdness, and the outré stylistic brilliance.

Desolation Road was an impressive first novel, the future Mars that McDonald created was as vivid and far more strange than that of Bradbury, the book was clear evidence that McDonald was a major new voice and a powerful and witty one, but I couldn't even begin to summarize the story, and I hardly remember any of the characters.

This, on the evidence, was not likely to be a writer inclined to or even capable of accommodating his output to some well-defined genre niche.

So what do you do with him?

This is the sorry pass that the literature has come to. Here is a potential major new talent at the beginning of his career and already there are publishing problems. At least two-thirds of the contemporary SF readership wouldn't touch work like this with a fork. Something like *Desolation Road* or *Out on Blue Six* is not going to appeal to the fans of *Star Trek* or Conan or Splatterpunk or *Mission Earth* or Elfquest or Heroes In Hell or The Fleet. It isn't even going to be very marketable to solid readers of Larry Niven or Poul Anderson or Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Dare I condemn McDonald by saying it in public? Has such a compliment become the commercial kiss of death?

Ian McDonald is a literary writer.

By that, I do not mean that he is pretentious or pompous or snobbish, nor that his fiction is dry and attentuated, but that the pleasures of reading his work are dominantly literary pleasures.

Out on Blue Six is, to say the least, an oft-told story, the post-catastrophe utopia that is really a dystopia of stagnation, the rebels against the system fighting to destroy the Bureau of Happiness and return cowed and lobotomized humanity to the stream of evolutionary dialectic with pain and travail that leads to the stars. We've all written this one, and some of us more than once. What makes *Out on Blue Six* as successful a novel as it nevertheless is is that McDonald has turned this moldy old chestnut into literature.

Admittedly, literature is not so easy to define, but when you have a good time reading a work of fiction, and particularly science fiction, where the set-up is one you've seen a hundred times, and the story

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is one you've written more than once yourself, you know that you are in its presence.

Humanity has surrendered its will to highly advanced computers with the prime directive to maximize happiness. The result is a self-contained pocket universe and a stagnant culture, and you know that the marginalized rebels will somehow succeed in hammering open the eggshell.

But in this case it doesn't matter, for McDonald has written a compelling and fascinating novel in which the plotline, the ups and downs of tension and release, even the payoff at the climax, are not the central interest, but rather are the structural backbone of a work of fiction in which the reader's attention is drawn into the inner meaning of the events, not the action-adventure surface. Which is as good a definition of literature as any. And, unfortunately, almost a perfect description of what the action-adventure format which dominates the great fat wad of SF Industry product excludes.

To make that description perfect, one must merely add that the prose of the commercial product seeks to disappear into the woodwork, to become transparent, to allow the readers to forget that they are reading it, to remove any intrusive literary interface between description and action, so that the reader will experience the story as a sequence not of words but of sensory images, something like watching it on your own internal TV screen.

This does not have to be an ignoble objective. Many good novels have been written by fulfilling it, including all of Heinlein's best work save *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, Algis Budry's masterpieces of the 1950s, most of Stephen King, and Clive Barker, whom we will get to later.

But this is, in a technical sense, an anti-literary objective, for it deliberately eschews one of the central pleasures of good literary fiction, the enjoyment of prose for its own sake.

I'm talking about the kind of prose you read in good Bradbury, or Jack Vance, or Alfred Bester, or Ian McDonald, where names like the King of Nebraska, Great Yu, Kilamanjaro West, Tinka Tae, do indeed call pleasurable attention to their deliberately playful existence, where passages of physical description have both sensory presence and inner music, and, peculiar to science fiction, where the prose at least to some extent is that of the imagined world, conveying thereby its extrapolated consciousness.

Now admittedly, there are characteristic pitfalls to this sort of thing, too, and from time to time McDonald stumbles into them. Sometimes you have the jarring distancing effect of the writer stepping outside the characters, the story, and the setting, to address you as the reader directly to say something clever. Sometimes it gets a bit twee. Most of the time, McDonald seems to be taking his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

material with deep seriousness and conveying psychological depth, but occasionally he seems to take the same world and play it for heavy-handed satire, or worse, for cuteness.

The danger in attempting amusing literary style is that you risk falling in love a bit with your own cleverness, that by stepping too far outside a surface rendering of events, you may lose the fine edge of respect for story or setting, and start playing games that attenuate reader involvement.

But it's worth taking the risk, even when the result is a work like *Out on Blue Six*, which does have its occasional lapses. The payoff, and peculiarly so for science fiction, is a work which draws you into a world that is truly alien not merely in event and artifact but in style and consciousness, that takes you inside characters unlike contemporary humans on fundamental levels, and that does so via prose that is a sensual experience in itself, prose that it is a literary pleasure to read.

And that's why it's a rare and precious event to discover a new writer working on this level. But if you're an SF publisher, what do you do with him? If he's allowed to develop properly, a writer like Ian McDonald will likely someday write a masterpiece that will transcend genre marketing boundaries, but how do you publish him in the meantime?

Something like *Desolation Road* or *Out on Blue Six* is simply not going to compete commercially for the mass adolescent readerships that the various subgenres of the SF industry are tailored to reach. These are books for sophisticated adults with a taste for literary pleasures, and that simply is not the mass readership that is gobbling up all the generic fantasy, horror, and franchise universe books with which it will be constrained to compete on the undifferentiated SF racks.

When he was editor at Timescape, David Hartwell had a rejection letter on his wall written by the late Judy-Lynn Del Rey, one of the most commercially-successful editors the field has ever known. It had been sent to him by the writer who received it, along with his submission of the novel in question.

And the gist of it was something like this:

Dear Writer:

Your novel was beautifully written, with stylistic brilliance, psychological depth, a genuine work of literature.

Unfortunately, we never publish books like this.

You might try Hartwell, once in a while, he does.

This time, David didn't either.

The awful temptation for editors is to take a talented writer with literary ambitions and abilities like McDonald and do to him what was done to Kevin O'Donnell after his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magnificent and innovative early novel *Mayflies*.

I wrote a review of *Mayflies* which was full of justified praise, in which I also opined that what O'Donnell needed now was a wise editor who would keep him on the promising path he had charted and discourage him from succumbing to the temptation to hack out some commercial trilogy.

They signed him to a ten novel series contract and used bits of my review on the jacket copy of the first installment. O'Donnell never finished the series and has not been seen in the first rank of science fiction writers since.

Spectra seems to be trying something different with commercially difficult but very promising developing writers like Ian McDonald by creating the Spectra Special Editions, which is to say carving out yet another subgenre for "literary speculative fiction," with modest advances and print-runs, series packaging, and a realistic perception of its readership demographics.

This is certainly a noble venture which we can only hope will succeed, but there is also something macabre about it. The concept of the Special Editions is almost a black satire on the sad literary state of the SF industry, where the only way publishers can see to do novels which don't fit comfortably into some sub-literate marketing subgenre is to package a new subgenre for them.

The situation seems even more sardonic with the second Spectra Special Edition under consideration, Dan Simmons' *Phases of Gravity*. This is utterly unlike *Out on Blue Six*, but it is just as fine a novel, if not more so, perfect of its kind.

But what kind of novel is it?

Simmons's first novel, *Song of Kali*, was a marvelous piece of work, mature, incisive, psychologically deep, written in admirably controlled and honed but more or less transparent prose. It was set mostly in Calcutta, a venue the reality of which is horrific and fantastic enough to western readers to create the psychological and esthetic effect of reading dark fantasy.

There was a true fantasy element as well, not really central, that is, unless you really believe that the spirit of Kali is indeed loose in the world, a proposition which may gain a certain contemporary credence by a reading of the newspapers. This was enough to make it readily enough packageable as a fantasy novel, and indeed it won the World Fantasy award, clear evidence of genre acceptability.

But *Phases of Gravity* . . .

What kind of novel is it? Meaning, what can you package it as?

Well, uh, it's a novel.

Richard Baedecker was one of the Apollo astronauts who walked on the Moon. All of that is over now, however, and the story takes place in the post-*Challenger* era, with all that that implies for NASA,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for a middle-aged ex-astronaut who is working as a fancy aerospace salesman, whose wife has left him, whose son is incommunicado in an Indian guru's ashram, who quits his job at this moment of mid-life crisis to journey around the country in search of that elusive something that has been lost, and back into his past.

Phases of Gravity is to some extent a love story between Baedecker and his son's former girlfriend Maggie, and there is a short stirring helicopter rescue of his son from another ashram in Oregon, the climactic action of which, however, takes place offstage.

But mostly it is Baedecker's vision quest for reconciliation with what has been lost, and the story of his relationship with the other two crewmen on the mission that was the lone peak experience of his life, Tom Gavin, who has become a born-again TV personality, and his true friend, Dave Muldorff, now a Congressman, and perhaps dying of cancer.

There is a lot here about flying, as an art, and as an esthetic and spiritual experience, and much too about airplanes and spacecraft that is wonderfully detailed and deliciously savvy, and a maliciously detailed vision of what has happened to the American space program and why. Only in Chuck Yeager's excellent and affecting autobiography do you have a sympathetic, affectionate, and true vision of the world of top-level test pilots to compare with *Phases of Gravity*.

There is also a lot here about landscape, hiking, what it means to be a Midwesterner, a father, a hero past his heroic time, real astronauts as human beings, and much, much more.

What there isn't is anything that remotely resembles any element of fantasy or science fiction.

Sure, if you stuck the manuscript in a time machine and sent it back to 1965, it might then have been science fiction of a certain peripheral kind, but even before Apollo astronauts walked on the Moon, *Phases of Gravity* would still have been unlikely to have appeared in a science fiction line.

This is not an action-adventure story but a story of character and friendship. The protagonist is no space-suited hero but a middle-aged has-been struggling to come to terms with his life. The resolution is spiritual and internal. There is no villain.

Phases of Gravity is, well, a novel. Before the Moon landing, publishers would have been likely to wink at the slightly futuristic hardware and the walking on the Moon, and do it as a general literary novel.

Twenty years later, when the book was actually written, none of the hardware or events are science fiction, but the only way it can be published is in an SF subgenre quixotically dedicated to preserving literary science fiction.

Think about what that says about the devolution of American pub-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lishing and the rise of the SF industry, but have a barf bag handy before you do.

There is hardly any such thing as a good solid general literary novel, which is to say what used to be considered just a novel, period, published as such anymore. There's no genre slot for it. It's not a best-seller, it's not avant-garde, it's not a bodice-ripper, it's not Seriously Academic, it's not a thriller, it's not a mystery, it's just a good novel.

If you're some guy who just writes good general novels, you're going to have a tough time being published. If you're Dan Simmons, with a track record in SF, well, maybe your SF publisher will sigh, wink, and slip it into an SF line.

Is this deceptive packaging? Better believe it. Is it an immoral thing to do? I think not. It is a measure of how far the SF industry has moved to the commercial center of American publishing that the most viable way to publish a fine general novel by a writer of SF like Dan Simmons is to shoehorn it into an SF line.

Ten or fifteen years ago, a science fiction writer's dream was to break a borderline SF novel out into general publishing. Now a science fiction writer is constrained to take a general novel if he's written one and get it published as SF!

Indeed, now that science fiction publishing has evolved into the SF industry, now that everything from *The Sword of Shannara* to *Hammer's Slammers* to *Elfquest* to The *Darksword* Trilogy to *Wild Cards* to the Gor books has been conglomerated under the mighty SF logo, what can be included within its bloated parameters is probably more varied than what must remain outside.

With the ream of commercial schlock that is presently being published under the SF banner, with the high fantasies, and the low fantasies, and the generic barbarians, and the film novelizations, and the franchised universe books, and writers turning other writers' short stories into novels, and the horror, and the space bodice rippers, with the trilogies, and tetralogies, and drekologies, it's only karmic justice that a good general novel that can't find a slot elsewhere once in a while manages to sneak out onto the racks by dressing up for a Worldcon masquerade.

Another good example is Scott Baker's *Webs*. Like Simmons, Baker has a track record as an SF writer. He's published several novels which did not make him a superstar, and he too has won a World Fantasy award, Baker's for a short story. He's an established SF writer in the extended sense, a writer of growing skills who has been published only once in hardcover, probably just at the point where he's starting to do really matured work.

Certainly *Webs* is a mature piece of work. Like *Out on Blue Six*, or *Phases of Gravity*, it deserved the hardcover publication that it didn't get on literary merit, a trade edition, whatever it sold, that would have enabled it to get the critical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attention that such a writer needs at this stage of his career, enhance the sale of the paperback, and build a reputation. But these days, this seems to be an archaic concept no longer relevant to the bottom-line realities.

Instead it has been published as a paperback original in the Tor Horror line with the legs of a giant spider menacing an upraised human hand on the cover, and a cover blurb that calls it "A novel of creeping horror."

Is this deceptive packaging?

Yes and no.

Yes, there are spiders central to the story, yes they are outsized and may have been artificially mutated, and yes Brian Gerard, through whose viewpoint Baker tells the story in third person, is certainly menaced by them.

But no, this is not a horror novel of the giant bugs school, or the Stephen King school, or the splatterpunk school, or the Lovecraft Circle, or any of the other sub-subgenres that the SF subgenre of horror is currently being sliced up into.

True, horrible things do happen to Brian, but the worst of them are not the spiders infesting the grounds of the crumbling estate in the Florida Keys that a jerkwater college is letting him rent cheap while he teaches courses on media to mostly hostile students.

The students are as venomous as the spiders, the faculty isn't much better, and the sex he is boozed and browbeaten into by an aging nymphomanaical colleague goes beyond mere arachnid horror, not to mention the evil game she plays with him later.

Brian's wife Julie is in a distant mental hospital, withdrawn, hostile, convinced that Brian is out to get her, after a freakout in Kenya, while Brian writes endless letters to the Julie she had once been for him.

Brian and Julie practiced a form of cooperative self-hypnosis that enabled them to send each other deeper and deeper into shared trance states where they could live in dream worlds that they planned beforehand. Julie is convinced that this forged a telepathic link between them. Brian is not so sure, but he does feel the intrusion of Julie's hostile consciousness into the trance states he puts himself into by himself.

Thanks to the spiders, which seem to be getting bigger than any spiders should be, and which terrify him. Brian gets involved with Karen, a student who is an expert on the subject.

She moves in with him, ostensibly to study and experiment with the spiders, but soon enough they are involved in a heavy and somewhat kinky affair, which gets heavier and kinkier when Brian convinces Karen to share the trance state trips with him.

To continue the plot summary much further would be to give too much away, but perhaps it is not going too far to point out that Baker scrupulously avoids stepping out of Brian's viewpoint at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any time, meaning that we only see the events filtered through Brian's consciousness. And Brian is someone whose wife has flipped out for reasons he may only be narrating in a self-serving manner, and someone addicted to autohypnotic states in the bargain.

Baker is using the powerful, tricky, and not-often-employed technique of the not-necessarily-reliable narrator, and even more unusually, he's doing it in third person stream of consciousness, not first person, which makes it a good deal more subtle.

Without revealing the ending, it can still be said that it hinges on the question of to what extent Brian has been telling himself and the reader the truth, to what extent he is subject to autohypnotic illusions, who is really out to get whom, and yes, to an extent, the true nature of perceived reality.

Is this fantasy? Are the giant spiders real? Is this science fiction? Are they the product of recombinant DNA technology? Is this a novel of psychological breakdown? Is Brian as out of sync with reality as Julie? Is Julie really out of touch with reality? Are the two of them telepathically linked? Is Karen a sexual black widow spider?

Baker brings the novel to a satisfying thematic and characterological resolution, but he does it without resolving all the ambiguities, for what *Webs* really is centrally is a novel about the inherent ambiguities of perceived reality.

Thus, a good deal of its power and subtlety derives from the very thing that must have made it a packager's nightmare—*Webs* would not work nearly as well if Baker had clearly resolved the genre question of whether this is science fiction (real giant spiders created in the lab), fantasy (a priori giant spiders used symbolically), or a realistic novel of psychological breakdown (giant spiders from the subconscious that infest perceptual reality).

Sometimes it seems that Scott Baker was hedging his publishing bets the way SF writers trying to break a book out into general publishing did in the old days: walk a fine enough reality line so that the novel can be taken as "mainstream" if you're lucky enough to get a publisher to do it that way, but include enough genre elements so that you can salvage publication as SF if you're not.

Webs would have worked better as a general novel because packaging it as horror tends to force a resolution of the central ambiguity by setting up genre expectations in the reader's mind before the book is even opened. With neutral general novel packaging, we would be relying much more on what Brian is telling us, and be that much more at sea about the reality level of the events he describes, which is where it is Baker's literary intent to put us.

But this is not the old days, good or otherwise, and today, as writers and as readers, we are stuck where the demise of the general novel into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the genrefication of everything has put us—with everything we write confronted by a wall of pigeonholed rack slots and our conception of the eventual nature of every book we read predetermined for us by the packaging.

Thus, many readers' enjoyment of a fine novel like *Phases of Gravity* will be soured to some extent by the wait for non-existent SF elements to emerge as promised by its genre classification, and another fine novel like *Webs* has its literary point diluted by having the reader preconditioned to resolve the ambiguity towards fantasy by the horror packaging.

A final personal example of this cheating of the readership by narrowcast marketing is what kept me from the pleasure of reading Clive Barker's *Weaveworld* for so long a time.

Barker, of course, made his mark with *The Books of Blood*, which were best-sellers in Britain, big hits in the US too, and made him a big enough instant superstar of horror to allow him to write, produce, and direct horror movies.

I only read the first two *Books of Blood*, and didn't much care for the stories. They were the kind of grand guignol barf operas I just adored as a twelve-year-old reading E.C. Horror comics, but it just wasn't the same with the full-color drawings by Ingalls and Wood and Kriegstein and Elder replaced by the wooden and clumsy prose description of Clive Barker.

The Books of Blood are the kind of stuff I can certainly enjoy in movies such as *Re-Animator* or *Wolfen* or even the TV series "Werewolf," which I had good nasty fun writing for myself. But without the visual imagery, stories about disgusting and nasty things happening to people leave me cold, all the more so when they are not very well written.

Nor do I have much taste for twee fantasies which promises epic adventures against dark forces to preserve the wonder of magic beneath the surface of our gray technocratic world. Nor with such McGuffins as the characters woven into a carpet coming to life or the existence of the land of faerie beyond the hill.

Which is more or less what the packaging and blurb material of *Weaveworld* promised me I'd be constrained to endure if I opened this 722 page fantasy novel written, somewhat strangely by a writer whose fame was as a hard-core horror writer of the guts and gore school.

So perhaps it's understandable that I didn't crack it until I happened to be in its presence in a situation in which I didn't have much of anything else in English to read. At which point, I was immediately sucked into it, and finished it over the next few days, without being bored by it for a minute.

Forget about the Clive Barker who wrote *The Books of Blood*. Forget about the director of those B-movies. The only relevance that Clive Barker has to the Clive Bar-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ker who wrote *Weaveworld* is that it was the publishing clout he had accumulated as the hoped-for second coming of Stephen King that allowed him to publish a book which tramples as many genre conventions as *Weaveworld*.

There is one way to write a novel that need not pay any attention at all to genre parameters and expectations and that is to position yourself so that you know your next book will be published as a "bestseller."

That's a specific publishing genre, too—you better believe it—but it's defined by packaging and print-run and ad budget and promotion, which in turn is determined by how hot the publisher thinks the writer is at the time. There are books by unknowns that become bestsellers for diverse reasons, but most bestsellers are bestsellers because they are written by writers whom the publishers rely upon to fill the rack slots in this princely genre entirely defined by the potential sales figures.

Meaning that as long as the bestseller writer turns in something that the publisher is satisfied will perform according to its expectations, he can do just about anything. It's about the only genre in which cynical bottom line publishing can actually enhance a writer's freedom from genre conventions and expectations. It's a savvy and lucky writer who is able to dance himself into this position. It's a rarer and wiser writer who then uses that freedom to attempt something like *Weaveworld*.

Yes, it's about a wonderful world of magic places and magic people that has magically woven itself into a carpet to escape from the twin nemeses of the Scourge, a dark force indeed, and the encroaching modernism of the "Cuckoos," namely we mere humans.

But it's also grounded in a meaningfully rendered contemporary Liverpool quite unlike Barker's pale shadows of New York in *The Books of Blood*. There are the folk of the carpet, very much the faerie denizens of Elf Hill, but also like the questionable denizens of an interesting bar in downtown bohemia. There is also horrific gore, phantasmagorical and otherwise, and no flinching from sexual and excretory matters either. One of the main nasties is a kind of Kali, and another is known as the Salesman. The Scourge itself, which goes through many complex conjectural mutations, once it is bearded in its Ballardian labyrinth in the mystical depths of the Arabian desert, ends up as a creature out of science fiction.

Barker doesn't so much ignore genre conventions and boundaries as exercise the total freedom to use anything and everything at any point in the novel. It's wonderfully refreshing to read a novel like this where the reality level, the tone, the imagery, is simply anything the author wants it to be at the time. It's Rudy Rucker's concept of "free-style" science fiction ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

panded to encompass everything within what is now the extended universe of "SF."

Playing with the net down?

Net? What net? This isn't a game of tennis, this is a bestseller.

Weaveworld isn't exactly fantasy, it isn't exactly horror, it certainly isn't exactly science fiction, and, indeed, makes no pretense of trying to squeeze itself into any of their parameters.

This is a new kind of novel. Someday novels like this may be their own subgenre. Or they may come to quite dominate the SF industry.

Weaveworld is an "SF" novel. Not any recognizable genre of fantasy or horror or science fiction, but all of them, a novel which ranges freely through all the literary possibilities jostling each other for position behind the SF logo.

Oh yes, if this becomes a trend, it will spawn a mountain of harebrained, undisciplined, amateurish vapidity, but it hasn't done so this time.

What Barker has done in *Weaveworld* is demonstrate that there's no reason why a successful work of literature or even of SF has to necessarily play by any set of rules.

If you regard the constellation of genres collectively identified as SF not for what defines them but for what the whole contains, then instead of genre boundaries, what you confront is the vastest cornucopia of imagery, characters, universes, dreams, creatures, wonders, and magics in all of literature, the unbounded collective unconscious of the species itself.

This is where novels as diverse as *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Ulysses, Barefoot in the Head* and *The Crystal World, Alice Through the Looking Glass* and *The Tin Drum* come from. This is where *Weaveworld* comes from.

What makes the book work is the only thing that can make such a book work, the story and the characters. When a novelist chooses to ignore the boundaries between realities and genres, between science and magic, between the esthetic and logical parameters of fantasy, horror, and science fiction, then only the story exists to give the book coherence, only the characters can involve the reader intimately with a reality that is purely literary and therefore unbounded.

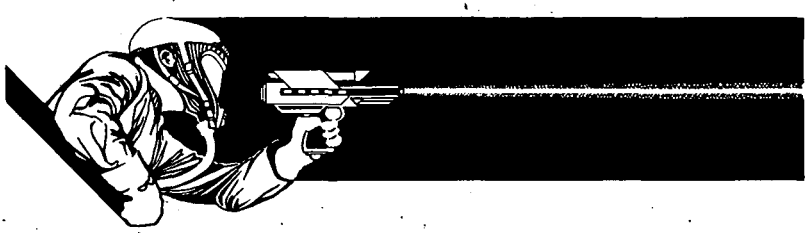
Clive Barker has come a long, long way from *The Books of Blood.* His prose has matured into an unexceptional but well-honed and finely controlled instrument, and by turning away from obligatory gore, he has deepened his empathy for his characters, probed their depths, faced their moral ambiguities, and attained a novelistic vision to be taken seriously.

And in a certain way, *Weaveworld* is also about that journey itself, the journey beyond preconceived conceptual boundaries, about the integration of the total subjectively possible human experience into a fully human culture, into a tapestry that contains all the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

threads of possibility, or for that matter into a literary work that transforms "SF" into true literature.

There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of by your packagers. ●



Classified Marketplace

IA FEBRUARY/90

ISAAC ASIMOV/ANALOG combination CLASSIFIED AD rate is $8.25 per word—payable in advance—($123.75 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional. To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS

SCIENCE Fiction/Fantasy. Free catalog of Pulps, Digests, Paperbacks, Hardcovers. Collections also Purchased. Ray Bowman, Box 167, Carmel, Indiana 46032.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box AA-54, Neche, ND 58265.

NUCLEAR WAR SURVIVAL AS A HOBBY FOR PARENTS; How (And Why) To Build A Permanent Concrete 20-Person Fallout Shelter for $2,000. 70 pages 8x10 illustrated, $5: David Lobdell, P.O. Box 3132, West Palm Beach, FL 33402.

SUPERLEARNING! Triple learning speed through music! Develop Super-memory; Control stress; Tap potentials. Free book excerpt & catalogue (Distributors Wanted). Superlearning, 450-Z10 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10123.

BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

VISION New Short Story SF Magazing. New Authors. New Ideas. Subscribe Now! 6 issues $10. To: Vision, 561 Dalton Way, Goleta, CA 93117.

HOBBIES & COLLECTIONS

STAINED GLASS starter kit. Send for free details. Astrosoft, 15006 La Mesa Street, Sylmar, CA 91342.

MISCELLANEOUS

READ "How To Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes a certificate worth $5.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy, send $3.25 (includes postage) to Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The Spring con(vention) season seems to start earlier each year, now in full swing by mid-February. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists, and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 [business] envelope) at Box 3343, Fairfax VA 22038. Early evening's usually a good time to call cons (most are home phones; identify yourself and your reason for calling right off). When writing cons enclose an SASE (and again, make it plain just what it is you're asking about). Look for me at cons behind the Filthy Pierre badge, making music.

JANUARY, 1990

12-14—**ChattaCon.** For info, write: **Box 23908, Chattanooga TN 37422.** Or call **(404) 591-9322** (10 am to 10 pm, not collect). Con will be held in: Chattanooga TN (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: M. Kube-McDowell, W. (Bob) Tucker, D. Cherry, R. Vardeman. D. Gill, the Lynchi.

12-15—**SerCon.** Westin Airport Hotel, San Francisco CA. (415) 458-9304. For serious print-SF fans.

19-21—**RustyCon.** SeaTac Hyatt, Seattle WA. (206) 244-6000. Ben Bova, Mike Grell, Frank Denton.

FEBRUARY, 1990

2-4—**ConFabulation, Box 443, Bloomington IN 47402.** Christopher Stasheff, the Suttons, John Ford.

2-4—**CzarKon, 1156 Remley Ct., University City MO 63130.** (314) 725-6448. Fenton MO. Adults only.

2-4—**Con2bile, 93A Park Rd., Peterborough PE1 2TR, UK.** The annual British SF folksinging con.

16-19—**CostumeCon, 3216 Villa Knolls Dr., Pasadena, CA 91107. (818) 791-9195.** Red Lion, Ontario CA. Masqueraders annual con.

16-18—**Circle Ouroboros, Box 492, Meridian MS 39302. (601) 693-0384.** Somewhat oriented to gaming.

16-18—**MarsCon, Box 12165, Newport News VA 23612.** C. Doran, K. Williams, B. Webster, R. Welch.

16-18—**Boskone, % NESFA, Box G, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139.** Springfield MA. G. Cook, D. Cherry.

17-19—**EclectiCon, Box 1524, Sacramento CA 95812.** P. & K. Anderson, Bob Vardeman, A. Robins.

23-25—**Arisia, Box 2334, Pittsfield MA 01202.** Downtown Boston MA. Richard Bowker, A. C. Farley.

MARCH, 1990

2-4—**ConSonance, Box 29888, Oakland CA 94604. (415) 763-6415.** SF folksinging con, son of BayFilk.

9-11—**WisCon, Box 1624, Madison WI 53701. (608) 233-5640.** Emma Bull, Ian Banks. Feminism & SF.

AUGUST, 1990

23-27—**ConFiction, % Box 1252, BGS, New York NY 10274.** Hague, Holland. WorldCon. $70 in 1989.

30-Sep. 3—**ConDiego, Box 15771, San Diego CA 92115.** North American SF Con. $75 to 30 June '90.

AUGUST, 1991

29-Sep. 2—**ChiCon V, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690.** WorldCon. Clement, Powers. $85 to 6/30/90.

AUGUST, 1992

28-Sep. 1—**MagiCon, Box 621992, Orlando FL 32862. (407) 275-0027.** The 1992 World SF Con. $50.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS PASS QUALITY TEST, COMMANDER. WHICH 5 DO YOU WANT FOR $1?

WITH MEMBERSHIP

SEE BACK PAGE FOR MORE BOOKS

1638 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $8.98

3756
Spec. Club Ed. $7.98

1263
Spec. Club Ed. $4.98

5878 *Swords and Deviltry, Swords Against Death, Swords in the Mist*
Spec. Club Ed. $7.98

6752 *Elric of Melniboné, The Sailor on the Seas of Fate, The Weird of the White Wolf*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

1172 *The Vanishing Tower, The Bane of the Black Sword, Stormbringer*
Spec. Club Ed. $7.98

HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN . . .

5 BOOKS FOR $1. Send no money now. You'll be billed $1, *plus shipping and handling, when your membership* is accepted.

A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION. If you're not 100% satisfied with your books, return them within 10 days *at our expense*. Your membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing.

THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE. You'll receive 14 issues of *Things to Come* a year. Each issue includes 2 Featured Selections plus a number of Alternates from the Club's library of almost 500 books. Twice a year, you may *also receive offers of Special Selections.*

SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE. To get the Featured Selections, *do nothing*—they'll be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the date shown. A shipping and handling charge is added to each order.

AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION. Take up to 1 year to buy 4 more books at regular low Club prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime. Or you may continue to enjoy the benefits of belonging to *The Science Fiction Book Club.*

HUGE DISCOUNTS . . . up to 65% off publishers' hardcover editions. Some Club books are altered in size to fit special presses. All are printed on high-quality, acid-free paper.

RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES. If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine came late and you had less than 10 days to decide, simply return the book *at our expense.*

THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB®

MAIL TO: *The Science Fiction Book Club*
Garden City, NY 11530

YES! Please enroll me in *The Science Fiction Book Club* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 5 BOOKS I've indicated. Bill me just $1, plus shipping and handling.

Please write book numbers here:

Mr./Mrs.
Miss/Ms. _____
please print

Address _____ Apt. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

ES640 38

If you're under 18, your parent must sign here _____

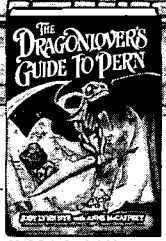
Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application. ISA 2/90

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TAKE CONTROL. GIVE US THE ORDER: SEND 5 FOR $1

WITH MEMBERSHIP

Use the other side to tell us which 5 you want to join with!



3947 Pub. Ed. $19.95
Club Ed. $10.98

4911 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $5.98

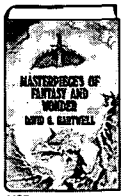
4069 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $9.98

0893 Pub. Ed. $17.95
Club Ed. $4.98

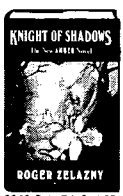
0448 Pub. Ed. $24.95
Club Ed. $14.98

3814
Spec. Club Ed. $12.98

5462 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $5.98



1107
Spec. Club Ed. $7.98

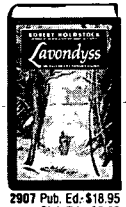


3848 Pub. Ed. $14.95
Club Ed. $4.98

3624*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

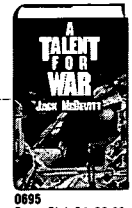
2568†
Spec. Club Ed. $4.98

2311 Pub. Ed. $17.95
Club Ed. $5.98



2907 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $9.98

3970 Pub. Ed. $16.95
Club Ed. $7.98



0695
Spec. Club Ed. $8.98

5355 Pub. Ed. $17.95
Club Ed. $4.98

3988 Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $8.98

3616* Pub. Ed. $18.95
Club Ed. $5.98

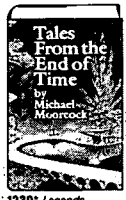
1420 The First, Second and Third Books
Spec. Club Ed. $8.98

7260 *Woundhealer's Story, Sightblinder's Story, Stonecutter's Story*
Pub. Ed. $45.85●
Club Ed. $8.98

1842 *Dawn, Adulthood Rites, Imago*
Pub. Ed. $52.85●
Club Ed. $9.98

1438 *Sight of Proteus, Proteus Unbound*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

2303* *The Heir Apparent, The Warrior Lives*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98



1230* *Legends, Messiah*
Spec. Club Ed. $6.98

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR MORE BOOKS

● Combined publishers' editions

* Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some readers

THE Science Fiction BOOK CLUB®

† Copyright © 1989 Paramount Pictures Corporation.
All Rights Reserved.
STAR TREK is a Registered Trademark of Paramount Pictures Corporation.

LICENSED FOR
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED